

A person wearing a red sweater is holding a grey megaphone. The megaphone has a large white question mark on its face. The background is a blurred white wall.

We Say We Want a Revolution

How to Activate
the Activist and Surf
the Tidal Wave
of Radical Change

Gina Amaro Rudan

I confess—
the revolutionary climate
we're experiencing right now
excites me.

Why? Because every monster economic crisis or socio-political upheaval brings bottom-up innovation, top-down collaboration, and a flurry of creativity that fills the atmosphere like glitter in a snowglobe. Think about it: in one short year, the power of collective hearts and minds has toppled dictators, turned out corrupt and dysfunctional governments, brought moral accountability to media and corporate abuses, and given the financial institutions a worldwide wedgie in the form of Occupy Wall Street. There's no denying it—we're knee-deep in an era of radical change that may well transform the way our world works.

I, for one, am thrilled to see the “public interest” back in the conversation. Yes, it's back in a messy, kind of unwieldy, shape-shifting way, but it is back. And even though the notion of the public interest has been in mothballs for more than 30 years, I believe with every inch of my body and soul that today's entrepreneurs and creatives and community-building trailblazers and cross-disciplinary renegades will redefine and reignite serving the public good during these revolutionary times.

So how do we get in on all this history-making action? How to be a part of the renaissance of the public interest? What can we *do* to rock the boat, shift the paradigm, and change the rules?

Well, don't rush out and buy a tent to pitch across from the White House just yet. Start instead by identifying the particular set of assets you possess—the combination of soft, who-you-are assets (your values and personal passions) and hard, what-you-do assets (your strengths and skills). These assets, when fully activated, integrated, and operating on all cylinders, are what I call your practical genius. This genius—unique to you and infinitely applicable to a whole world of scenarios and challenges—is your ticket to the revolution. Here's how to get there from here.

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Know What You Believe

For lots of us, each day is a balancing act between the people we are in our work and who we are in the other parts of our lives. We engage our hard assets—our skills, strengths, and expertise—in the work we do, but relegate our soft assets—our values, passions, and creativity—to the life we live in our “free” time.

It wasn't always like this. As kids, we worked, we played, we laughed, we cried, we were creative and imaginative as much as we were practical and resourceful—all at once, day in and day out. The combination of all our assets was natural, risk wasn't something to fear, and curiosity ruled the day. Other than maybe homework and doing the dishes, nearly everything you did as a kid was a kind of raw expression of what you cared about. Time passes, though, and we march through the stages of life—college, career, marriage, kids, more career—and wake up one day twenty or thirty years have passed, then we wonder, “Hey, what was that? What happened? Who *am* I?”

What happened is that somewhere along the way, you checked what you believe in and what you care about at the office door and work became work instead of a vital expression of your values, passion, and creativity and you ended up with a career built around what you

do best rather than what you love. Who you are today is someone who can't quite say what you believe in, can't really name your passions, and thinks other people are creative, not you.

Many years ago, the late, great journalist Edward R. Murrow had a radio show called *This I Believe*, a concept that was revived recently on public radio. Each week, he featured an essay written by a notable of the time, such as President Harry Truman or dancer Martha Graham, as well as ordinary folks like us. The essays strove to express what these people believed in, what core values and day-to-day truths helped them live genuine lives. The pieces were, as you can imagine, surprising, touching, and above all, deeply personal.

Fast forward to today. Ask the next person you see, even someone you know well, "What do you believe in?" You'll be shocked at how many good, accomplished, highly principled people will have trouble answering that question. And you'll likely be embarrassed to discover you can't answer it easily either.

More than any other aspect of your makeup, your values are the closest, most accurate reflection of who you are—what others would see if everything else was stripped away and all that was left was what you stand for. When you lose touch with your values or don't know how to express them in your work and daily life, it's easy for your sense of purpose to get blurry and for your

passions to end up dusty and forgotten in the attic, next to your old roller skates and high school yearbook.

Think about how much is missing from your daily life—in the quality and satisfaction of your work, in the health of your relationships, and in your whole sense of self—when you separate your values and passions from your skills and strengths instead of syncing them up and letting them express together, all at once, what you're really made of.

Put words on your values—big, specific, and actionable words that bring heart and meaning and accountability to the work that you do. Exercise your passions—not recreationally as a hobby or a pastime, but as a critical component of your work, your play, and all of your relationships.

Albert Einstein often insisted that he had no special gifts, except perhaps his curiosity, focus, and persistence. So the all-time poster person for genius pointed to his personal values as the source of his accomplishment! When your values lead, the revolution will follow.

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Act Up

Over the course of my research and writing, I have encountered many people who have found the core of their own genius, the sweet spot where the head and heart intersect and a whole world of individual and collective potential is unleashed. I have also discovered why that spark of genius never quite ignites in so many others.

The great American engineer and futurist Buckminster Fuller once said, “Everyone is born a genius, but the process of living de-geniuses you.” That’s what so many of us are seeing when we look in the mirror—our de-geniused self. You know who I’m talking about—the one who’s chosen a risk-averse, routine life, the one who sacrifices values and passions to the expectations and influence of others, the one who sabotages your own potential by accepting the safety of mediocrity. This is the side of you that operates from fear and shines dimly, if at all. This is the person who has allowed people, organizations, environments, and circumstances to beat the genius out of you. Enough already!

If you want to see change in the world you live in, you need to change the way *you* operate day-to-day. You have to level with yourself about just how de-geniused you really are. You have to call yourself out on the compromises you’ve made for the sake of comfort and security.

You have to find the courage to put all your assets in play, to live your genius out loud, no matter how much it scares you.

This rejection of your personal status quo is also the unimaginably powerful first step you take toward collective change. When you let go of the de-geniused self that was holding you back, you will discover your capacity to instigate and drive change. The invisible and ineffectual de-geniused “me” will become the highly visible, fully activated “we” who jumps at every chance to engage in dynamic dialogue, collaborate creatively, and forge a practical path forward. Acting up—speaking out, organizing forces, taking bold action—will be your default genius mode.

Live Your Legacy Right Now

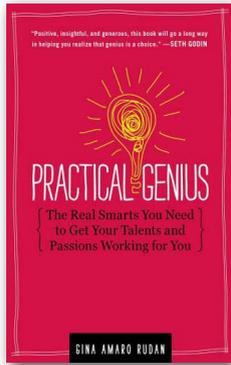
Among many other spiritual insights, Sogyal Rinpoche’s *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* presents the provocative idea that the minute we are born, we begin the process of dying. While this sounds a little like Woody Allen’s worst nightmare, in fact, it’s a wonderfully liberating way to think about the choices we make every day. How meaningful and values-based our decisions and behaviors are is as much a reflection of how we die—the *legacy* of our lives—as how we live, or the *quality* of our lives.

That's why I think the most deeply personal, publicly impactful, truly revolutionary thing a person can do is to live your legacy every day. Live mindful of the impact you have on the lives around you. Live focused on improving the ideas and practices that inform your life. Live dedicated to creating, not consuming; serving, not demanding; connecting, collaborating, and cooperating, not pursuing a solitary path; being a local change agent while engaging with your worldwide community. A day that doesn't reflect a contribution to the common good is a day where your legacy was neglected. That's right—it's not all about you!

I like to say that if genius were to have a physical address, it would be located somewhere between your heart and your mind, at the intersection of those hard assets and soft assets I've described above. This is your "other G-spot," the perfect expression of everything you have to offer and an absolute acceptance of your own contradictions, a place where your paradox flourishes. It's also the secret to a life lived with authenticity and purpose, the best way I can think of to define legacy.

Look, for all of our heel-dragging, status-quo hugging, change-averse behaviors, believe it or not, we're wired for transformation and, yes, revolution. **We've got the assets we need to make it happen, if only we can get out of our own way.** 📌

Info



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR | Gina is an author, thought leader and the President of Genuine Insights Inc., a contemporary professional development and training practice whose mission is to leverage the genius within every individual and organization. Gina spoke on the subject of genius at the 2010 TED Global conference at Oxford University and is the author of *Practical Genius: The Real Smarts You Need to Get Your Passions and Talents Working for You*, which was published by Touchstone/Simon & Schuster in the fall of 2011. She is also a regular contributor to The Huffington Post, BestThinking.com, and Business2Community.com.

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