"Most prodigies ... apply their extraordinary abilities by shining in their jobs without making waves. They become doctors who heal their patients without fighting to fix the broken medical system or lawyers who defend clients on unfair charges but do not try to transform the laws themselves."

These are some really big and complicated systems, whose fixes you (unfairly) lay at the feet of prodigies. Perhaps a brilliant doctor should also be creative healer or researcher, but why should (s)he also be burdened with administrative or bureaucratic duties in order to make small changes to the "system" or with getting involved in politics, where policy-level changes would be made? They're very different roles.

As for lawyers ... Generally, case law changes over time, as judges look to prior decisions when faced with new ones (stare decisis or precedent). Statutes change when a body of lawmakers collectively change them. Revolution in law is systemically avoided and, anyway, tends not to happen due to the efforts of a couple of creative people. E.g., many brilliant and creative lawyers have been arguing against mandatory minimum sentences for over 20 years, but only in recent years when the masses started to recognize the injustice, has there been any real movement. Gandhi, of course, changed an entire system, mostly not in his capacity as a lawyer. But obviously his lawyering skills helped. Then again, there's no suggestion that he was a prodigy.
Jim Phoenix

It's our extremely poor education system. While countries like Singapore and Finland have long employed methods that encourage creativity and personalized teaching, we offer our students played out standardized tests and hope the advantages of our wealth make up for our problems. I blame not only the system but more so the parents. Most parents I speak with are in favor of our current methods and falsely believe 'better' teachers are the way forward and speak disparagingly of encouraging creativity or personalizing teaching. And don't ask them about eliminating standardized tests.

Jan. 31, 2016 at 11:47 p.m.

Bill M Lexington Ma

I was interviewing a job candidate who had played golf in college on a nationally ranked golf team - and was a scratch golfer. I asked if he ever considered going pro and he said "no, I enjoyed my time on the team and love golf. But after 4-hours of practicing chip shots, I was ready for something else. The guys who turned pro would practice for chip shots 4-hours, then putt for 4-hours, then work on their swing in their apartment. They just loved it that much."

Jan. 31, 2016 at 11:46 p.m.

Brad Steel d' hood

Great article on how to make genius children more geniусy and win some special prizes or write some sonatas. I am going to make no rules for my above-average toddler and he will certainly neb the next sonata-writing Noble physicist to ever rise above above-averageness!

Jan. 31, 2016 at 11:42 p.m.

Mike Wilson Danbury, CT

Using an achievement test as indication of quality education will not promote creativity.
We must focus on the uniqueness in each child.

Jan. 31, 2016 at 11:42 p.m.

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**SusieQ  Europe**

Nobel Prize Winner Sydney Brenner had an awful lot to say about creativity and innovation in the sciences. Here's a taste: "I strongly believe that the only way to encourage innovation is to give it to the young. The young have a great advantage in that they are ignorant. Because I think ignorance in science is very important. If you're like me and you know too much you can't try new things. I always work in fields of which I'm totally ignorant." This interview is worth reading: [http://kingsreview.co.uk/magazine/blog/2014/02/24/how-academia-and-publi...](http://kingsreview.co.uk/magazine/blog/2014/02/24/how-academia-and-publi...)

Jan. 31, 2016 at 11:39 p.m.

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**Roger Ewing  Los Angeles**

As the father of a very successful son, I can say this about intelligence. Intelligence alone does not guarantee success in life. My son's 6 year old friend, who is gifted, beat me at checkers, taught himself to read, etc. My son on the other hand, while highly intelligent, is not considered gifted. He is a doctor now doing his residency at a highly respected teaching hospital, while the friend who beat me at checkers is bouncing around from one dot com to another.

Why? My son learned the importance of hard work. He experienced the satisfaction of performing at a very high level as a result of old fashioned hard work. As a result, he is more successful and well adjusted than his peers. Yes, I applied very few rules as this article suggests. However, I presented many opportunities for him to succeed by working hard to do it.

My recommendation is simple. Have few rules, teach values, nurture every day and make opportunities for your children to succeed as the result of their commitment and effort. It's a winning combination.

Feb. 1, 2016 at 12:20 a.m.
This is yet another article that conflates creativity with nonconformity and assumes that those who dedicate themselves to math and science invariably end their lives as emotional wrecks. The author has provided no definition of the word "creativity" which renders the rest of the argument moot.

Is the painting that accompanies this piece creative? Why? Because it's colorful? Creativity as free-form, unguided expression (like Chippendale's piece) needs to be addressed apart from creativity as a unique approach to a well-defined problem. Don't assume that those who dedicate themselves to the latter are less creative, passionate, or free than those who embrace the former. Unfortunately, society will always reward - in school and beyond - the creative problem-solvers more than the creative expressors because, frankly, their results are verifiable. It might be blasphemy to say so here, but some types of creativity can be objectively judged as good or bad. For all we know, Brian Chippendale might hate the piece that accompanies this article.

Regarding the predictive value of the WSTS talent search, the author scoffs at the fact that "only" 8 of 2000 have won Nobel Prizes. For those of us who understand math and probability, that's quite a jaw-dropper. Those who "fall short" of a Nobel prize probably don't regard themselves as failures.

Feb. 1, 2016 at 12:08 a.m.

Eaton Lattman  Buffalo, NY

It is early in 2106, but I wager that Professor Grant will win the annual award for the most misleading statistics published in this section. He says with some disdain that only 1% of Westinghouse talent search alums have been inducted into the US National Academy of Sciences. The NAS has about 2200 current members, so that the chance of a random person being a member is a little less that 1 on 100,000. The Westinghouse group is enriched by more than 1000-fold. I find this enormously impressive, but it is nothing compared to the Nobel Prize statistics. Westinghousers have won 8 Nobel Prizes. Since 1952, 10 years after the Westinghouse program started, Americans have won about 300 Nobel Prizes – including economics, which is not really a Westinghouse area. Of these about 200 were born in the USA. So Westinghouse alums have won
several percent of ALL the prizes. Astonishing, not trivial

Feb. 1, 2016 at 2:37 a.m.

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**RoseMarieDC** Washington DC

Why so much emphasis in the "creative" now? It used to be the academic. Today, it is being creative. Which is the next fad? I believe that the objective for parents, schools and societies is to foster well-rounded individuals, who can have successful lives in all areas: work, relationships, spiritual, etc. For this, they need to learn how to think, but also about adaptation, problem-solving, creativity, empathy, ethics, authority, etc. Focusing on only one aspect -in this case, creativity- might produce an artist, but not necessarily a happy person, or one that is able to successfully adapt to his/her environment. I’d rather think about the whole child, and not about a creative child.

Feb. 1, 2016 at 2:35 a.m.

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**Dr. LZC** medford

I'd love to see research on the connection between relative wealth and safety and the type of creative risk-taking the author is talking about. There are some incredible prodigies who used their brilliance to free themselves and fight oppression, such as Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, Nat Turner, and Phoolan Devi. But many if not most of the game-changers relied on their parents' wealth to free themselves from labor and thus perfect their art, business, or cause (Henry James, William James, Virginia Woolf, Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg). The creativity to build, destroy, notice patterns, and make rules is largely innate in human beings, nurtured primarily, but not exclusively, by safety, love, and opportunity. Individualistic creativity may be lauded in much the same way that kindness is, but it is not a crucial feature in the lives of most humans, in their experiences with families, schools, or jobs. In other words, there is nothing wrong with the prodigies, who do not exist beyond their times and circumstances. Many prodigies and plodders have achieved the success of rising beyond their class, and creating safety for their families. Superior intelligence is helpful, but actually not a precondition for creativity, game-changing innovation, or the ability to build a complex organization requiring the brains and loyalty of many. Finally, I suspect that some prodigies do better with rules and boundaries.

Feb. 1, 2016 at 1:49 a.m.
ACW New Jersey

A couple of stray points here.

1. You may have the passion but not the physical talent. For instance, long, flexible fingers, such as Van Cliburn had, make a concert pianist. All the practice in the world, plus perfect pitch, plus determination, won't overcome ten stubby thumbs. Dyslexia, colour blindness, two left feet - who knows how many great careers were derailed by physical limitations?

2. Practice develops technique, and without technique there is no art. Picasso could paint with perfect realism; Joyce could write perfectly grammatical prose. Both mastered the rules in order to break them intelligently. Real art isn't about the artist and his jejune 'self-expression' or 'feelings'. Art is what happens when the artist vanishes into the work.

3. You cannot decide to be creative, not and produce anything of real value. This is why so many movies and TV shows rely on formulae. And also one reason I didn't write as a profession (and hated what little of it I did do). Creativity is like the ghost in a good haunted-house story: it's what you never get to look at directly, but just sense moving out of the corner of your eye. I have found, if I re-read my own work months or years later, I can always recognize the bad passages as mine; the good stuff, though, seems to have been written by some stranger from a parallel universe, or perhaps wrote itself.

Jan. 31, 2016 at 11:38 p.m.

academianut Vancouver

Although the examples used here makes the article interesting to read, it gives the impression that Adam is focused on a very extreme and unnecessarily narrow definition of creativity.

People can be very creative and utilize that talent to shine in a myriad of work roles and not necessarily stand out as 'creative'; and many people are extremely creative without necessarily being revolutionary or transformative; and creativity isn't necessarily obviously creative looking. The doctor who heals patients may be particularly talented at thinking outside the box to solve puzzling cases, the lawyer that rescues the unjustly accused may be a star because of her creative argument building. Indeed, I would argue that Adam Grant's ability to publish so effectively in boring academic journals comes in part from tremendous creativity on his part. Where it may be obvious that art, or music,
or writing are 'creative' so too are a ton of less obvious tasks. And very few of these are 'transformative' nor need to be.

Likewise those that are revolutionary in their accomplishments most likely have far more going on for them than creativity. Factors such as persistence, connections, dominance, a wealth of resources, a sense of security, or pure happenstance might be some of those. But it is perhaps too simplistic to chalk it up to simply creativity.

Someone  Midwest
The very title of this piece continues to support the idea that there is a magic formula to make your child successful/creative/innovative/disruptive/etc. There isn't. I believe that the ugly truth that most parents need to accept is that their children are average. It's not a bad thing to have average kids. However if and when kids show interest in things, parents should encourage that interest and nurture it.

Bread angel  Laguna Beach
Creativity can manifest itself at various phases of life. As one who needed and wanted to make a good living, I chose a great profession. When I retired, I relit the creative talent that I had put aside. Like most things in life, balance is important.

Student  New York, NY
Grant writes, "Try to engineer a certain kind of success, and the best you'll get is an ambitious robot". Hardly what I would conclude from the evidence presented earlier. After all, "A vast majority are... as winning at a cocktail party as in the spelling bee" who "apply their extraordinary abilities by shining in their jobs without making waves". So, I ask, is a charming, well adjusted individual who excels at their high level profession, nothing more than an "ambitious robot"? I, as a parent, hope for nothing more. In any
case, while evidence is presented that certain innovative individuals were unfettered by rules growing up, we don't really know much about the childhoods of your garden variety overachiever.

This is the great American delusion. We are endlessly playing the lottery to make it big, to join the pantheon of Steve Jobs et al. We disdain those who merely work hard and succeed at their professions. We don't value "the doctor who heals his patients" but fails to "fix the broken medical system". We fantasize about raising Game Changers and end up with citizens who can't even play. It is a fantasy of privilege and exceptionalism. We think that we can sit and create because others can take care of the menial stuff ranging from cleaning bathrooms to skilled lawyering. We are too good for hard work. Good luck with the dollar and the dream.

Jan. 31, 2016 at 11:31 p.m.

bern La La Land

As a guy with a high genius IQ, I say figure it all out for yourself. PS, I had a great education and that helps one enjoy the wonders of existence.

Feb. 1, 2016 at 2:55 a.m.

Meela Indio, CA

You cannot 'grow' a genius. You cannot grow a Joey Alexander who will never win a Nobel unless jazz piano becomes a category. You can grow accomplished people but that's not necessarily the same. Creative people think differently than others and they came here that way. I am one of them. I was raised in a permissive household and what I wish for was just a little more discipline because I was (and still am) interested in a great many things but was allowed to flit from interest to interest. I think there is something to be said for gently directing the multi-talented renaissance children to see a project through to its end. What I always needed was a rationale for what was asked of me. Sometimes parents are too enthralled for the child's own good.

We are not all gifted in the same areas and I don't think the Nobel Prize is the right metric. But what I can see resulting from this article is all of these undisciplined children acting out because they are mummy's little geniuses. Most of us still need to live in this
world where unlike Lake Wobegon, not all the children are above average. With the right cultivation though, anyone can live a productive and satisfying life.

Feb. 1, 2016 at 3:00 a.m.

Mike
Alexandria

great story. there is such overwhelming evidence out there to support this and I see it all the time, especially when I coach baseball. I have witnessed over the past 15 years of coaching recreational ball, the kids of the parents who yell, bribe, push and cajole their kids, are the ones who lose interest in the sport and don't pursue it once they get to an age when they decide on playing or not. It's the parents who allow their kids to develop on their own who enjoy the game the most. Unfortunately, most rec coaches push, yell, punish and bribe the kids they coach and out by me, they wonder why none of the kids want to play past the age of 10.

When are we going to start the push in government to help people raise kids? To help parents realize what it truly takes to raise an emotionally healthy child.

Feb. 1, 2016 at 3:00 a.m.

Fran
IL

We only had one rule in our house growing up: Get Straight A's. I got straight A's, I hated my parents. You reap what you sow. I'd rather raise my kids teaching them about respecting others and themselves—achievements, whether creative or scholastic, are secondary.

Feb. 1, 2016 at 3:02 a.m.

Jackie
Missouri

I, myself, think that there is a huge difference between being able to think outside the box and being a child prodigy with natural gifts, and just because one has one thing does not mean that they have the other. It's a whole different set of wires (or neuron connections and impulses) inside one's head.

Feb. 1, 2016 at 3:21 a.m.
Tom Rowe  Stevens Point WI

I like the idea in general. Helicopter parenting is never a good idea. Letting the child pursue their passion without being overly directive probably does foster creativity. And if you have a child prodigy on your hands, they are likely to be superior in a number of different areas.

But there is a flip side to this. Most children, even bright children, are not budding geniuses. What do you do if the child is passionate about something for which they have no talent? For instance, having an "ear" is not something you learn. If you cannot distinguish adequately between tones (something that is basically genetic in origin) are the child is passionate about a career in singing, are you just going to let that take its course or will you try to direct the child in another direction? By the same token, if you set no rule structure for the typical child they will not likely be diligent about learning what they need to learn. They might be more creative as adults, but that doesn't mean they will invent anything useful.

It can be a difficult balancing act. Too much or too little of anything, including rules, is unlikely to produce the best outcomes.

Feb. 1, 2016 at 2:26 a.m.

observer  PA

Good examples of the truism in this article ; Ivy college dropouts like Gates,Musk,Zuckerberg etc

Feb. 1, 2016 at 2:26 a.m.

TES  Los Angeles

I walked a dilatory path through acting, writing, anthropology, philosophy and farming to end up in my mid-twenties at an Ivy League law school. Having spent 8 years getting through a state university, never living in a dorm, dropping out twice for various reasons, I welcomed the community that results from being forced into the same classes
and blind grading of my peers. But I also quickly realized how many of my very bright peers had spent their entire academic lives on a goat path towards "success." Some were creative. Most were just impressive box-checkers. I quickly figured out how to outperform them in law school - just do a little something creative on every exam and paper - but it made the idea of practicing law seem deadly boring. I am now a screenwriter.

Feb. 1, 2016 at 2:01 a.m.

Crazy Me  NYC
Don't lead your children. Follow them. Pick them up when they fall. Dust them off, then push them out there again.

Feb. 1, 2016 at 1:55 a.m.