

Who's In Charge Of Bob?

**The Key To Moving From Ordinary To
Extraordinary**

**By
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Introduction

It had long since come to my attention that people of accomplishment rarely sat back and let things happen to them. They went out and happened to things.

~ Leonardo da Vinci

If you plan on being successful, let alone extraordinarily successful, what you need to do is uncover your natural talents and build them into strengths. And just in case you might be wondering, you are talented; everyone is.

After twenty plus years of working with students from middle school to college, I haven't yet met a single student whose life pursuit was to be mediocre or average or well-rounded. Is this your goal? Are you seeking to be mediocre or average or well-rounded? No? Then perhaps, you're looking to become *more of who you already are*, and to master your life and your future.

Caution, however. The society you live in may be completely satisfied with you being mediocre, average or well-rounded. Why is that? Simply put, it is precisely where most people have found themselves. Therefore, they're most comfortable with you being just like them. For you to do otherwise, you would become a threat to their comfortably average life.

If you find this disturbing or frustrating...good! Keep reading, and you may find yourself becoming *more* irritated, even defiant. And you just may become motivated to take charge of yourself and your life.

Society is not only *comfortable* with you being average; it wants you to continue to focus most of your energy and time on fixing what it has determined is broken about you. It's what I call *The Weakness Trap*.

The Weakness Trap starts very early in life. Do you realize we have a scale or predetermined standard of some sort set up to track almost every growth, step, achievement, segment, and milestone in our life?

Consider this: it starts the moment you're born. The medical staff weighs you, measures you, and draws blood from you, all to get an understanding of how you "fit in with" or "measure up to" the standards. Any deviation from the norm and we immediately start to work on your weaknesses. This process of tracking how you fit in and measure up continues throughout almost every element of your life.

Once you enter the educational system, society's desire to track, label, and categorize you begins in earnest. We call it *standardized testing*. I'm sure you are already aware of the emphasis we place on

the results. Our culture has an insatiable desire to know how well you're going to fit into our educational box. If you deviate from the standard, we have a whole host of labels at our disposal to categorize your weaknesses and start the process of remediation.

But don't think you're safe if your standardized test scores tell us that you're above average or that you excel in a particular area – because if you do, we have labels for that too. We're going to categorize your excellence, place you in advanced educational tracks, and set an even higher standard for you to meet (a standard that may keep you continuously stressed out). These advanced tracks are often not related to any desire on your behalf, or to the talents that you personally would like to further develop. These “tracks” often follow you right into the university system, where you find yourself in honors college, studying a subject you're good at but may have little interest in. You also discover there are a lot of other students just as intelligent as you; and you realize for the first time that you might not be the smartest person in the room – and that stings.

Perhaps the worst case is when you fit somewhere in the middle; you're just average. “Average classes with average grades” is your norm. We get so comfortable with you being average, we forget to ask you to excel at anything, and you end up getting lost in the crowd. This is often referred to as “the marginalized middle.”

You might assume that this is where I'm going to start bashing our public education system, but you would be wrong...mostly.

I wholeheartedly believe the majority of educators, including myself, are in education to make a difference in students' lives. Your teachers and professors have a passion for the educational process, for the art and science of teaching, and for helping students grow into highly capable adults; and for all of these reasons we want you to succeed.

Our educational system has introduced a number of new, compelling, and innovative “movements” that you may have had the pleasure of participating in; movements such as self-directed learning, character education, career counseling, and college placement services. We're increasing the emphasis on Career and Technology Student Organizations (CTSO). We continue to increase the value of college internships and hands-on learning, and we have expanded your choice of college majors.

I also wholeheartedly believe that our education system is going to have to continue to make major changes in the way we go about teaching you to succeed. We have to change our mindset about the teaching process and the value we place on standardization. We have to understand that the job market has become increasingly global, and that what the world's economy is looking for from you is changing much more rapidly than our education system. It's been reported that, in just twenty years from now 40 to 50 percent of all available jobs

currently don't exist. These jobs don't exist because they have yet to be created. That's mind-blowing when you think of the possibilities for your future employment.

Let me be clear: I don't think the primary problem lies with our professors or teachers. The problems we are facing are intrinsically built into the system and design of our schools; a system that was built decades ago and designed to produce well-rounded factory workers, and a system that has trouble accepting rapid change.

There are an amazing number of highly educated and dedicated administrators, professors, and lawmakers working on the best practices for the future of students' education. Changes to any organization as large as the public education system always take time; but these are intelligent and innovative people and they will find a way to change and advance our system.

The question is: will any of these changes be in time to make a difference to anyone reading this book? I'm sorry to admit that I'm less optimistic that there will be widespread changes in time to have a positive effect for you.

However, that doesn't mean there are no answers to how you can be more prepared for your next step. Whether it is getting a job, continuing your education, starting your own business, or leaving the education system to pursue self-directed education, there are important steps you can take to set yourself on the path of what I call *extraordinary success*.

The primary focus of this book is *to help you take one big step along the path to extraordinary success*. It's my desire and my passion to help you become more of who you already are – **by helping you to understand your unique personal talents and build them into strengths**.

I'm on a campaign to help students, parents, educators and administrators *to shift the focus from the remediation of your weaknesses to the development of your individual strengths*. My motivation to write this book comes from my desire to share with you what I have learned about surviving academic challenges and achieving career success by focusing on my strengths and learning to manage my weaknesses.

As you read, you will discover specific ways to develop your personal strengths by identifying your talents. The end goal is for you to continue to pursue mastery in the areas of your greatest talents.

Chapter Two You Are Talented

It may be hard for an egg to turn into a bird: it would be a jolly sight harder for it to learn to fly while remaining an egg. We are like eggs at present. And you cannot go on indefinitely being just an ordinary, decent egg. We must be hatched or go bad.

~ C.S. Lewis

We've all heard the saying: "You can be anything you want to be, if you just try hard enough."

Well, that isn't true, but: "You can be more of who you already are."

Statements like, "You can be anything you want to be," or "If you can dream it, you can be it," are at best misguided maxims passed on to you by parents and caring adults when you were a child. The falsehood of these statements lies in your possible lack of natural talent in a particular area. If you don't have the required talent that you can build into a set of strengths, you're just not going to be successful.

Well-meaning parents, grandparents, teachers, and all manner of others, will tell you as a child that you can be anything you want to be when you grow up. This sounds great; and it makes adults feel good about all the possibilities for a child's future. And it also makes us feel nostalgic about our own past when we had so many choices.

We get a warm and fuzzy feeling about the grand future facing a child. It's fun to talk to a young child that is full of potential and seemingly without limits. But children are not a blank canvas of every opportunity and possibility that others can dream up for them. We'd like to think that every option, possibility, and dream is within a child's grasp, but it isn't.

The *reality* is that from the moment of your birth you have unique characteristics that will set you apart from others. And this is fabulous news. These characteristics are natural to who you are. Many people are of the opinion, and even science would seem to suggest, that these characteristics are, in fact, part of your DNA. How you choose to use what is naturally yours becomes *the key to your future*.

So, as well-meaning adults, we will most likely continue to make the same mistake, telling you that you can be anything you want to be until reality hits home.

Think of it this way. You come home one day and announce to your father you're dropping out of school to create video games for the

expanding cell phone gaming industry. You're going to develop the next Angry Birds or Candy Crush.

Mind you, your dad has always told you that you could be anything you want, so his negative response surprises you.

"That's great, son. Where are you going to live, how are you going to eat, and where are you going to get that fancy computer stuff you'll need to develop those games?"

You're confused by his lack of enthusiasm. "What do you mean? I didn't say I was moving out; I said I was dropping out. Dad, it's my dream job!"

Your dad's response: "Great, son, but your dream needs to come with an apartment, an education and a job."

When I was a kid, I dreamed of being a basketball player. However, I'm a guy that can't jump, shoot, dribble, or pass. I'm so bad at basketball, I can't even watch it on TV. I turn the channel to ESPN to watch a game and the TV automatically changes channels. Seriously. When I was thirteen I was 5'5" and built like a tree stump; but still, I had a dream.

At thirteen, I played recreational basketball. Let me just say I was not good. However, as the season progressed I got better. I managed to learn to dribble the ball without hitting my feet. I could stand still and pass the ball. I understood the importance of getting the ball to someone who could actually score. I was given my mandatory two minutes of play in each game and my level of improvement was remarkable; it was even noted by my coach.

At the end of the season, the coach told me I had really improved. He put his arm over my shoulder and said. "Fred, you really improved this season. But, I don't think basketball is your sport, and you should seek other sports endeavors, like soccer." Oh yes, he did. This wouldn't have been so bad if the coach wasn't my dad...just kidding; the coach did say that, but he wasn't my dad.

Perhaps it might look like this: You announce to your parents you're packing your bags and moving to Nashville to become a country music star.

Your mom says, "Now let's be realistic here, honey. You don't play an instrument or write songs, and your singing...(uncomfortable pause)...is not really great."

"But Mom, it's my dream! You always told me that I could be anything I wanted to be."

"I understand, but you have to be realistic. You don't just decide to be a music star and it comes true."

"But you told me I could be anything I wanted...."

If you're not exceptionally *talented* in a specific area; no matter what your dream is, it is unlikely to come true. The reality of life is that your real talents, gifts, abilities and personality are what determine your future success. You have to base your dreams on the reality of your talents, not on a fantasy.

Don't get me wrong. You should have high expectations and dreams for yourself. You should, in fact, have *extraordinary* expectations for yourself. The key to attaining success, however, is to make sure your expectations and dreams are based on your natural reoccurring *talents*, and not based on fantasy. My dream of being a pro basketball player was based in fantasy, not on my natural talents.

Defining Talent

As described by Gallup's StrengthsQuest: "Talents are naturally recurring patterns of thought, feeling, behavior or attributes that can be productively applied. A great number of talents naturally exist within you, and each of them is very specific. They are among the most real and most authentic aspects of your personhood."

You are talented!

You are talented! Even if you don't think you're talented, you are!

From all my years of experience with students, I know that telling you you're talented often falls on deaf ears. It's really hard to believe you have something special to offer if you don't feel special. You look around and compare yourself to others. Everyone else seems to have something you don't have. It doesn't matter whether you're at the top of the class, or barely struggling to get by, or maybe you fit somewhere in the middle. It doesn't matter because someone always seems to be smarter, better looking, more gregarious, or more athletic than you. They come from the right side of the tracks, or from families that seem to have everything figured out. Other people just seem to have it more together.

When you say those things, you're just like every other student I have ever met. You suffer from a lack of self-confidence, self-esteem, and/or purpose. Yes, I said every student. The thing is, everyone has doubts and issues. I haven't met the student that has it all together. They might look like it on the outside, but they are struggling in some way or another.

Welcome to your life! All of us have times when we feel this way. Even the most outwardly confident people have their junk, their stuff, and generally crappy times.

Believe me, I understand why you might think you're not talented. When I was younger, I never thought of myself as talented in any way. In fact, I believed I was completely devoid of talent. I was an untalented goober surrounded by a world of talented people. You can see I had a very high opinion of myself; and I started thinking this way back in elementary school.

From the very start, school was a challenge for me in almost every way. My first memories of being in class are ones of failure, fear, and loneliness. I was not a good reader, or good at math, or at any other subject. The only thing I seemed to be able to do was make people laugh.

It might sound good to make people laugh, right? Armpit farts and booger jokes are funny at any age, aren't they? Except in a classroom where you're required to sit still, be quiet, pay attention, do your work, and not be funny. I spent a lot of time sitting in the hallway by myself.

My teachers just didn't know what to do with me. I passed all the standardized tests of the day. I had an IQ that said I was smart enough not to have to be in a "special" class. Yet I didn't seem to have the drive or skill to keep up with my classmates.

It wasn't until the second grade that one teacher seemed to think I might have more going on than what was on the surface. My second grade music teacher was the first to see me differently. Don't get crazy here by assuming she saw any music talent in me; if I totally lack talent in any area, it's in the realm of music. My singing has been described as possibly similar to the sound you might get if you swung a cat by its tail. (Don't try this at home.)

What my music teacher did see in me was a kid that needed some direction and attention; she had a sense that I was more capable than others were giving me credit for. She became my first advocate, and she asked others to take a closer look at my skill level and my difficulties. Upon further investigation, it was determined that I had a learning disability known as Dyslexia. So, I have a music teacher to thank for believing in me, even though I have no music abilities.

Being diagnosed with the learning disability or difference known as Dyslexia comes with a host of issues. Statistics tell us that about 10 percent of the population, and perhaps even more, have Dyslexia; it is the most common learning disability. Dyslexia is a disability that includes difficulty in the use and processing of linguistic and symbolic codes – alphabetic letters representing speech and numeric

symbols representing numbers or quantities. Simply put, I had a lot of trouble learning to read, write and do math.

Dyslexia is not something you can fix. You can't take medication to make it better, nor will you ever grow out of it. There are levels of severity from very mild forms to extreme forms; and I land somewhere in the middle. The good news is: the earlier you can identify someone as being dyslexic, the better chance they have at overcoming the obstacles that Dyslexia presents.

But I'm not fixed and never will be. As a dyslexic, I could spend years trying to master the rules of grammar and spelling. At some point, I could perhaps be good at it; but at what cost to other areas in my life where I am naturally talented? To this day, I'm a horrible speller and the king of the run-on sentence and comma splice. I also read slowly; and please, never ask me to read out loud in public.

Let me be really clear here. I'm not suggesting that you ignore your weaknesses or the things you simply have a hard time doing. Everyone has to have the basic skills to survive in society, including academic and social skills. Most of these skills have to be taught and learned, and they take practice. Also, your weaknesses have to be dealt with and managed. I will talk more about dealing with your weaknesses in Chapter Five.

For me, being dyslexic meant special education classes and having to repeat the second grade, which by itself is not that bad. However, when you add in that I have a December birthday, it makes it worse; because at that time, to start kindergarten or first grade, your birthday had to be before November. So I was already one year older than most kids, and repeating the second grade meant that I was two years older; and that meant I would be nineteen and a half years old at graduation.

As you might imagine, being in special education classes and being two years older than my classmates attracted a great deal of attention, and not in a good way. I became the target of bullying – not the in-your-face pushing and shoving bullying, or being threatened; rather, it was a quiet form of bullying that I call academic bullying.

Academic bullying is quiet because it happens right in the classroom when the teacher isn't looking. The teacher passes out the latest graded paper or test and your classmates start asking, "What did you get?" I would cover my paper with both hands and hope against hope that no one would ask me what grade I got. The grades I received meant that I was called names like "dumb," "stupid," and "retard."

If you have ever been a victim of bullying, you know how unworthy you feel. It's scary to be picked on. Bullying comes in a lot of forms these days – academic, physical, and cyber bullying. The world we live in can be, and often is, a mean place. You have to become resilient.

You have to learn to deal with the mean people in life. You have to build up your self-confidence and esteem. And if you're being bullied, you have to tell someone. Find a caring adult and tell them what is going on. You don't have to be afraid.

For me, I never felt like I measured up in the eyes of my teachers or parents. Loneliness and failure are perhaps the best descriptions of what I was experiencing. I didn't think anyone else was feeling what I was feeling. Now, I know how wrong I was.

Perhaps you have felt this way at some point – like you just don't measure up. Maybe, unlike me, you were great at school – but your big sister was better. Or, you bring home your mid-term grades with all A's except for one B, and your mother just wants to talk about the B. Possibly, you're one of those people who is always comparing yourself to how smart you think other people are. Do you check your class standing at the end of each semester? That's a lot of pressure to maintain.

There is an extreme amount of pressure to succeed and "fit in." It doesn't matter whether you're playing sports or you're in the band. Since I mentioned the band, holy hell, the band is one of the most pressure-packed places in school. Ask any band member and they'll tell you.

Football players think they have it bad at practice. Try being in the band. Practice never seems to end. Two-a-day practices weeks before school starts. Playing at the football game on Friday night. Then spend all day and late into the night most every Saturday at competitions. And these are pressure-packed events. Add in all the other music groups most of the students play in as well, and you have over-worked, over-stressed, and tired students.

Everybody has their stuff. Your stuff might not be the same as your buddy's stuff. To you, theirs might not seem as difficult as yours, but everyone has their stuff to deal with.

But here is the good news. All of these experiences can help us uncover our talents....

Being dyslexic also had benefits, although I certainly didn't realize it at the time. Some call these benefits "gifts" or "advantages," as Dr. Brock and Dr. Fernette Eide do in their book, *The Dyslexic Advantage*. I highly recommend their book if you're dyslexic or know someone who is.

Looking back on my childhood, I have to admit that there was a particular skill set that emerged because of my Dyslexia. Being dyslexic meant relying on humor and storytelling to get my point across. Anytime there was a class project, I would focus on it, because it allowed me to show what I had learned. But it wasn't really

until college that I felt talented at anything. It wasn't until I expanded my view of what it meant to be talented that I actually began to believe I had talents.

This brings us back to my earlier statement: You're talented even if you don't think you're talented.

Our society tends to have a very narrow view of what it means to be talented, and the media perpetuates this notion. Who hasn't seen *American Idol*, *So You Think You Can Dance*, *The Voice*, *The X Factor*, or *America's Got Talent*? And let's not leave out ESPN as a source of misguiding our view of talent.

Must you be able to sing, dance, play an instrument, create lavish artwork, or be a sports star to be talented? Just in case you might be wondering, the answer is "No!" Anyone who can do the above listed activities at a high level is talented. Good for them! But if you can't do those things, it doesn't mean you're not talented.

Let's take a closer look at you...uncomfortable yet? You have to understand that everyone, including you, is a unique creation. There is no one in the world like you. There might be someone who looks like you, but they are not you, and nor will there ever be another you. Think about how amazing that is: out of the billions of people on this planet, there has never been, or ever will be, another you. You are 100 percent unique.

You have unique DNA, neuro-pathways, body structure, and life experiences, and you are *full* of talent.

Each and every person has been given specific talents, often referred to as "gifts." With these talents comes the responsibility to use them in service to yourself and especially in service to others. Those who can identify their talents are much more likely to make a major impact on others. The reason is simple: when you know what you're good at, you want to share and to teach others.

Broaden Your View of Talent

Let's face it, you probably don't have the natural talent to be an international pop singing sensation or rapper or rock star. You're probably not going to be drafted as the next sports icon or win an Olympic gold medal; and nor is your artwork likely to gain you international fame. Yet, you do have talents that must be identified and then invested in.

Let's begin to broaden your view of what it means to be talented, remembering our definition of talent: talents are naturally recurring patterns of thought, feeling, behavior or attributes that can be

productively applied. Talents are not knowledge, or skill, or simply what you might be "good at."

Here is an example. A student is extremely good at math. She actually describes math as fun. Can you believe that? Megan actually does math problems as entertainment. She is a true math geek. (I think I might be a little jealous.)

Megan did her senior project in high school on some math theory I had never heard of. She attended a prestigious college that is highly dedicated to math. Megan earned a degree in math and later started working on a master's degree in math. But all of a sudden she realized that she didn't want to "do" math. She was really good at it, but she didn't want to do math as a job or career.

Suddenly Megan's life was in turmoil. She had all this education in something she was good at, but she didn't want it to be her career. Math had come easily to her and so she had just kept on doing it. But now what?

Fortunately, Megan took some time to re-evaluate her talents and strengths. She realized that she loved helping others and that she was a great planner and communicator. She had a great deal of experience working with students and loved having an impact on others' lives. Now she works with students every day, and she loves her job working in student services at an Ivy League university. She still does math but just for fun.

Knowledge is simply what you have learned or know; you can acquire knowledge through education and/or experience. Knowledge includes basic education in math, science, history, and language. You can know a great deal about something or have experience with it and not be able to apply it productively. You might be great at algebra but not be able to apply it. Maybe you did fine in Spanish class but you can't order lunch off a menu in Spanish at your favorite Mexican restaurant.

Skills relate to the accomplishment of a task. They too can be acquired through formal or informal training, and skills typically build toward knowledge. We first learn to count our numbers, then to add and subtract, and eventually we move to higher levels of math. You can learn leadership skills like how to delegate, or how to manage a team. These are skills that allow you to work well with others. The skill to write HTML computer coding can be learned and applied, but like the other examples, they are not natural talents.

Natural talents are not those things you're simply good at, though there are those that label them as such. It's much like Megan having a great deal of knowledge in math and not being able to, or willing to, apply it productively. The things you're good at are best described as affinities – a subset of talents, if you will.

Affinities might be activities you enjoy doing, such as playing recreational sports, taking art or dance classes, playing video games with friends, or cooking. Or, if you're like Megan, doing math for fun. You can spend a great deal of time doing these activities, but they aren't talents. You may actually be using some of your talents while participating in your affinities, but the affinities themselves are not natural talents.

Natural talents are, literally, *what you do without any effort*. They are your core personality traits - the types of things about which your parents might say, "I just don't know where he gets it." Natural talents don't change over time. They are the things about you that remain constant.

Your talents empower you. They make it possible for you to move to higher levels of excellence and fulfill your potential. Researchers from Gallup tell us that most often your highest achievements will be linked to your greatest talents.

Your natural talents often show themselves in the things that make you mad, happy or sad; and they may show up fastest when you're placed under stress. You will rely upon your natural talents when life takes a turn for the worse, because when bad stuff happens, we rely on what comes naturally to us to survive.

At this point, you understand that society is stuck on fixing what is broken about you, and that you need to break this cycle by learning to identify your unique personal strengths set. We've discussed that your strengths are made up of your natural talents. Next, you need to begin to broaden your view of talents. As you broaden your understanding of talents, you will start to recognize that you are, in fact, talented.

So let's begin to discover and uncover your talents.