

Randy Taussig

Embracing Your Genius

Growing up, Randy Taussig saw things differently. He wasn't effortlessly good at school like his older brother, and had to work hard to achieve academic results. "For the longest time, I didn't feel smart enough," he remembers now. "I always felt like I had to prove myself. Society tends to define 'genius' pretty narrowly—that particular brand of book-smart intelligence that shifts paradigms. But as I got older and came to know myself better, I saw that there was more to it. I came to realize that most everyone has genius."

It took Randy a long time to accept that he had a particular kind of genius all his own, and even longer to embrace it. He tried to fit into the normal structure of companies, but he always felt suffocated, unable to pursue his natural inclination to invent and create. With time, he realized that those inclinations were entrepreneurship, and that his unique point of view could add significant value. "Everyone has a genius about them in some way," he says. "Everyone has their own ideas, perspective, skills, and talents, uniquely combined to create an unparalleled gift. I think everyone needs an opportunity to understand what they're good at. Then once they embrace their genius, everyone has the responsibility to create the space to fly with it."

While this advice is meant metaphorically, Randy has a literal passion for flying inspired by his great grandfather, Noah W. Taussig, a stamp collector who got President Woodrow Wilson to sign the first envelope to ever be officially mailed by plane. Now the founder and CEO of BlueCore Leadership, an Entrepreneurial Operating System (EOS) implementation company dedicated to equipping entrepreneurs with the leadership and management tools they need to succeed, Randy sometimes tells the story of the day his plane almost went down. Hurrying to evade forecasted

thunderstorms, he missed a simple step on his checklist of procedures. He forgot to secure the cockpit, allowing cloud condensation to whip in mid-flight. He had to make an emergency landing, and in the end, the forecasted thunderstorms never even materialized.

Even if they've never flown a plane before, entrepreneurs find the story deeply relatable. Each one has had that fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants experience where things suddenly go very wrong. But each knows they're undeniably drawn to the risk and reward of the cockpit. "Entrepreneurship is freedom," Randy affirms. "There's a cost to that freedom, but I'll take it any day. Let me make my own destiny. Let me succeed or fail. Let me create."

Every ride is smoother with procedures, checklists, and a wiser understanding of weather patterns, and for entrepreneurs, BlueCore Leadership is all those things. Randy launched the company in 2012 after reading Gino Wickman's *Traction*, a method and philosophy for better business success through utilization of the EOS tools. Comprised of six key components, the process begins with the leadership team. "They need to be crystal clear about their vision so they can back it with solid execution and create a healthy, functioning organization," Randy explains. "A lot happens that can throw a business off track, so EOS helps founders and leadership teams stay very true to their vision and execute it in the most effective manner."

Making hard decisions is a vital skill in leadership, so EOS includes a mechanism to facilitate the decision-making that is critical to moving an organization forward. Another key component of EOS revolves around a method for solving problems called IDS, or Identify-Discuss-Solve. "Everyone has issues, and the sooner we identify them, the sooner we can get through them," says Randy. "It's essential that we get to the



truth of a situation, even if there's resistance. My best moments are the breakthroughs that come when I decide to 'go there' and take a risk, initiating that hard discussion."

BlueCore Leadership typically works with leadership teams of organizations that fall between \$2 and \$50 million in revenue, though EOS can be implemented to improve businesses of any size. Its process is typically a two-year journey, and though the details of business problems are typically unique to each organization, the EOS framework is built to address all manner of headwinds. "For example," Randy says, "family businesses often struggle with legacy, expectations, and an inability to be direct and honest with members of the family. 50/50 partners sometimes don't see eye to eye. Husband/wife companies have their own unique dynamics. EOS allows us to understand those dynamics and adjust the flow of a business so entrepreneurs can reach their highest potential."

Internally, Randy has always felt connected to the energy of his entrepreneurial roots, which run deep to the time of his great-great grandfather. In the 1800s, the man started two bakeries in DC that served the Union Army, and Abraham Lincoln himself is quoted as saying, "There's something about their molasses pies!" Those businesses grew into a publically-traded company, Ingredient Technology Corporation (ITC), the multi-million-dollar molasses and sugar refinery business where Randy's grandfather, a dealmaker and people person, served as President. "I think I got some of my entrepreneurial tendencies from watching my grandfather," Randy says. "But even though I never met my great-great grandfather, I do believe there's a piece of his legacy living in me."

Randy was born in Littleton, Colorado, and moved to the small New Jersey town of Mountainside at the age of five. He liked school and sports, playing Little League and obsessing over the Yankees. He also remembers the time he and his brother set their sights on buying a Boonie Bike that they could ride down the hill in their backyard. To raise the money, they sold lightbulbs door-to-door, washed cars, and did yardwork. "Turning that bike on was like starting a lawnmower," he laughs. "It could probably only do 30 miles an hour, but it felt like we were going a hundred! It was so much fun."

Randy's father was a PhD chemist at Mobil Chemical Company, now ExxonMobil. He

was often working, and Randy's mother—a stay-at-home mom—was the more dominant figure in the household. "She's from the Bronx, and I picked up from her an element of street smarts," he reflects. "She was always very savvy and able to cut through any "BS." My father is more the classic intellect with a brilliant technical mind, and while I didn't inherit that kind of genius, I got his positivity, kindness, and ability to connect with people."

Randy should have learned that good things can come from surprise curve balls when he made the junior high baseball team, even after a pop fly ball hit him right between the eyes on the last day of tryouts and sent him to the hospital for stitches. But he was devastated when, poised to enter his eighth grade year, he got the news that his father was put in charge of a new acquisition in Taiwan. "I had lots of close friends and was just getting into girls," he says. "Life was good, and then our parents sat us down and broke the news. It felt like someone had just put a knife through my heart. My brother and I weren't even sure where Taiwan was. It was the first time in my life where I realized that things can hit you out of left field, and you have no control over them."

On foreign soil for the first time, Randy distinctly remembers the complicated feelings of guilt he felt living in a nice home while local Taiwanese subsisted in shacks just across the street. It was his first experience with what was then a Third World Country, and that first day, the shock of encountering poverty made him cry. The cost of labor was so low that the family could afford a driver, a cook, and a maid, and he never got over the uncomfortable feeling of such blatantly inequality. "It was a completely different reality, and seeing it made me grow up a lot," he says.

But even in its hardship, living in Taiwan was a deeply positive experience. Randy played soccer, joined the swim team, and attended the Taipei American School. "I remember being very worried that we'd be behind in our studies when we got back to the United States," he says. "As it turns out, we were actually ahead." His father had four weeks of leave each summer, and instead of going home to visit America, the family traveled to Europe, Fiji, and Australia. "I made great friends, experienced whole new cultures, and learned that traveling is a way to open your mind and your heart. I learned about myself and about what it

means to be an American in the world. And above all, it taught me that life can throw you curves—sometimes really big ones—and even if you're terrified at first, it just might turn out to be the best thing that ever happens to you."

Of all he encountered, among the most life-changing aspects of his time abroad was the set of Rogers drums, complete with Zildjian cymbals, that he was able to buy for half of what they cost in the US. Randy and a few friends formed a band called Persuasion, sparking his lifelong passion for drumming. They would play at the teen club in town, and Randy will never forget the night they opened for a popular act in a concert hall of 5,000 people. "It was the most exciting thing I've ever done," he exclaims. "Playing drums had been a way of expressing myself with pure, raw energy and emotion. To this day, I have so much gratitude for my parents for letting us practice our hearts out in our basement. That was really an act of love and tolerance on their part. I also remember how our family dog would sit by my side even through those thunderous practice sessions. In this way, drums came to symbolize not only freedom of expression, but also the love and support of my family."

After three years in Taiwan, the family returned to Mountainside for Randy's senior year of high school in 1976. Interested in testing the entrepreneurial waters, he and a Persuasion bandmate, Dave Powell, formed a legal partnership and started a pool service company, purchasing products from a regional wholesaler and selling them for a 200 percent markup. They did pool openings, closings, rental equipment, and other odd service offerings, figuring things out on the fly over their next two years of operation. "We did actually turn a profit, but I'll never forget sitting in our office in Dave's basement, trying to deal with a customer that wouldn't pay us," Randy recounts. "I couldn't believe something like that could happen. It resulted in our first write off."

College planning wasn't a focus in Randy's family, and upon graduating, he found himself at a lax institution where students were more interested in skiing than studying. "I began to realize, wow, maybe I actually want more than I think I want," he recounts. "I saw that I hadn't done enough to take responsibility for where my life was going, so I transferred to the University of Delaware." At the advice of the guidance counselor, he signed up for economics, accounting,

statistics, computer science, and engineers' calculus—an incredibly difficult course load that almost killed him. "I found a happy medium the following semester," he says. "But the defining moment of that experience was the choice to take responsibility and the importance of taking charge. I was right to transfer, but wrong to take the guidance counselor's advice without questioning it. I didn't even know until halfway through the calculus course that it was for engineers, when I was a business major!"

After graduating with a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration with a concentration in Finance, Randy got his first job at ITC, the large publically-traded company that had evolved from his great-great grandfather's bakeries. "Because I had the Taussig name, I really had to prove myself," he recalls. "But it was really incredible to be there during a period where they were growing through the rapid acquisition of small, privately-owned food ingredient companies. It was my first exposure to the world of small businesses and acquisition."

While working at ITC, Randy took night classes at Rider University to complete his MBA. He then took a position at one of ITC's newly-acquired companies, a manufacturing business, to run their marketing. When ITC sold that division to a German company, Randy decided to stick with the jettisoned division, marking his departure from the family business. He spent the next twelve years working his way up at Sued Chemie Performance Packaging, maneuvering his way through several high-stakes nail-biters and ultimately running marketing and sales for an international division.

When Randy was ready for his next challenge, he landed at Packexpo.com, a startup in the packaging industry at the end of the dotcom boom. As the VP of Business Development, he focused on landing large clients to raise their valuation—a star-crossed mission, given the timing of the ensuing bust. In 2002, he founded Taumark Systems to provide marketing services to small businesses. "That company was profitable but challenging because every project was different," he says. "I decided it wasn't a good model. When I got called for a VP of Sales & Marketing job in 2008, I decided to take it."

While Randy enjoyed the work, he couldn't shake the feeling that he was adjusting his skills to fit a conventional job mold. Then, in 2011,

a client-turned-EOS implementer gave him a copy of *Traction*. “As it did with so many people, the book really resonated with me,” he says. “I loved the simplicity of it and truly felt it was a game changing roadmap for small entrepreneurial businesses.”

The following year, Randy decided to confront his fears and start his own business—one that would plunge him back into an entrepreneurial life while helping others with theirs. There were hard times, but at the end of the day, his excitement for the work—coupled with a core belief in himself—kept him moving forward. “Too often, entrepreneurs are stifled or lost when they find out how hard it is to run a business,” he says. “But if you can give them tools and encouragement, surround them with good people, and say ‘keep the dream alive,’ you empower them to embrace their genius and bring their vision to life. I know that for me, I’m at my best when I’m driven by opportunity and excited about what’s possible. That’s the experience I work to create for others.”

Perhaps inspired by his passion for flying, Randy’s entrepreneurial journey has been a wild one, and the ride has been accompanied by his beautiful daughter and by his partner of sixteen years, Mary. “While she’s a healthy skeptic when she needs to be to help me stay grounded, Mary has been absolutely supportive along the way,” he says. “We want the best for each other, and though she spent her career in Federal and County government, she’s always been very interested in entrepreneurship. In fact she ran a county program to prevent child abuse, which had a lot of entrepreneurial elements to it. We’re a good balance.”

Today, Randy remains a dedicated student of the EOS process, attending quarterly collaborative exchanges in Detroit and always looking for ways to explore its nuances. An inclusive, collaborative leader, he strives to engage others so the overall process benefits from the strengths of all involved. He’s innately compelled to fix whatever problem he encounters, but he also

has the wisdom to recognize that not all problems need fixing. In his work with clients, he’s a teacher and coach, pushing entrepreneurs to be their best. “I love working with clients that have ideas sparked by necessity, or excitement, or their own genius,” he says. “They take risks, and they fall. They’ve taken falls that some people would feel were the end of the world. But they get back up, take responsibility, and embrace the power of their own genius to persevere.”

In advising young people entering the working world today, Randy cautions against the kind of victim mentality that leads people to believe they aren’t in control of their own lives. “From Day One, take complete responsibility for your path and realize that you’re always the one in the driver’s seat, no matter where the road leads or how rough it gets,” he says. “Take the time to understand and embrace your own intelligence. Guard against complacency, because you could miss an important opportunity. Take charge of your destiny and embrace adversity, because there’s probably something really great if you can make it to the other side. And never forget—you’re a genius.”

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