Case History

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The world has forgotten the miraculous works of Sir Nikola Tesla. He was indeed a genius, his will was to supply free electricity to the whole world through the Tesla tower project, but because of financial problems, it remained incomplete. People believed that he was from the future and could communicate with aliens. The A.C current, which we use today, is the gift for humanity by this great scientist (Tesla, 2007). The most mind-blowing fact about him is that he invented the radio and the alternating electric current and never took credit for all of those. Even if it is true that he got crazy later in life, those two put him on a very high pedestal. Another thing is that he was apparently able to work out all the details of a machine in his head. And he rarely made mistakes. At least in the first part of his life.

Nikola Tesla was/is one of the most unique and influential people to ever live, to see why one merely has to look at his staggering list of achievements. He was able to perform integral and differential calculus in his head. Most people find it extremely difficult even when given a calculator. He spoke eight languages and was able to recite all of the Serbian epic poems from memory. It is whilst doing this, and walking through a park in Budapest that Tesla looked up at the sun and saw a blinding vision (literally and metaphorically) of a polyphase induction motor, and thus instantly saw a solution to the rotating magnetic field issue that was causing severe problems for his academic counterparts.

All of his complex Designs and schematics were somewhat designed and stored in his mind; he barely made any sketches. Marconi's ‘invention' of the Radio, was based on a large volume of work previously done by Tesla. As quoted by the man himself: "Marconi is a good fellow, let him continue. He is using seventeen of my patents". Nikola Tesla pitched the idea of a Radar System to the United States Navy in 1917, a full 18 years before Watson-Watt was credited with its invention (Valentinuzzi, 1998). He was researching X-Rays long before Rontgen was credited with their discovery. In addition, Nikola Tesla did all of these things in his lifetime. Invented the hydroelectric dam, Neon lighting, Radio control, the electric motor. Experimented with Cryogenic engineering years before it became public knowledge. He discovered the resonant frequency of the Earth, something that wasn't confirmed to be correct until 50 years later, his patents were used in the development of the transistor two years after his death (O'Neill, 2007). Another aspect of his personality that is so influential on all of his inventions and discoveries was his obsessive-compulsive nature; tesla notoriously had Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) during a time where it was not a clinically defined condition

At the very end of his career, he suffered from depression, agoraphobia, and germaphobia. He had certificates worth a couple of million dollars of Westinghouse stock but refused to cash them in so wouldn’t fold. He died a penniless man. Nikola Tesla had some convoluted ritual every time he went to dine. He would insist on performing this for several minutes before he began eating. Additionally, he always wore white gloves when he ate. With regard to his germaphobia, this came from more reasonable causes as a young Tesla was nearly killed by cholera. However, he took his cleanliness to the extreme. There was a story that a fly once landed in Tesla's soup. He immediately called for the soup, the table setting, and the tablecloth itself to be replaced with new, fresh ones.

The word obsessed has been used to describe Tesla throughout his life. Generally speaking, continuously pushing oneself to exhaustion and sleep deprivation are not the best things one can do to take of themselves. During his days in college, Tesla was described as being so obsessed with his ideas that he could not focus on his schoolwork, and that leads to a nervous breakdown. Years later, after Tesla failed to get the needed funding to keep his Wardenclyffe laboratory, along with the frustration of seeing Marconi taking credit in the eyes of the world for inventing the radio, something Tesla claimed was his invention, he went on another downward spiral that leads to another nervous breakdown.

Moreover, He was convinced aliens were trying to send him a message. Years later, it was found out that he really did receive a signal from space, but it was a lightning storm on Jupiter. The man also just did not sleep. He slept 2 hours a day and worked 84 hours straight once, which is very unstable, in my opinion. OCD does not make one crazy since it is definitely one of the most misunderstood disorders, but his habits were so strange that they are worth mentioning here (Feller, 2010). Before eating, he would compute his dinner exact cubic volume. This habit of him got developed in his juvenile years. Generally, kids do not even know what cubic volume is. He also had to stack 18 napkins in a pile before touching his food, and it had to be 18 because it is divisible by 3. Tesla did all in 3s, which is not uncommon for people with OCD. He walked around the block 3 times, sum his footsteps while he did so, and whenever he stayed in hotels, he had to have a room number that would be divided by 3.

Furthermore, he also had this very extreme fear of germs. He was uncomfortable making physical contact with other people, and he was repulsed if he touched someone's hair and cringed when people wore earrings. He used to wear gloves to avoid the skin to skin contact, and if he did, he immediately washed his hands after. Besides, he spent so much time looking at microscopic beings in drinking water; that being said, he boiled and sterilized his water. His views on women and marriage were also really peculiar. A lot of people say that Tesla never married (or had sex) because Tesla believed that inventors should not marry because a woman since it would divide his attention. However, according to many biographies, that is not exactly true. To some biographers, Tesla declared it, but it is ambiguous. He actually had a little romance with a French actress. Later in his life, he admitted that as a kid, he had put women on a point that made him consider them unworthy. He saw his chastity as fear of women that had cost him the joys of life, yet he did not entirely regret it because science was basically his wife.

In addition to these facts, Tesla also believed that whiskey was the secret to longevity. He had a glass of whiskey every single day. Not because he was an alcoholic but because he genuinely believed it would help him live until he was 150. He actually had a reason for thinking this, although it seems kind of ridiculous. Men drank heavily in Tesla’s family and yet lived very long lives, and he believed there was a correlation. He also did the same and claimed it gave him bursts of energy and will sustain his life (Rivera). At the time of occurrence of US prohibition, Tesla was not happy and said the administration was robbing him of liquor and they have reduced his life period to only 130 years. There was also that time where he didn't have any money to pay for his hotel room, so he handed the clerk a "death beam" (basically the same idea as a death ray) and told them that it would explode if it is opened by an unofficial person. After Tesla died, the FBI opened it because they're risky like that, and nothing happened. It was just a standard electrical part.

The best fact about Tesla was he fell in love with a pigeon. In his few years before his death, he spent a lot of time feeding pigeons, and one day, he met this pigeon and felt connected to it. The pigeon followed him around and flew to him when he called. He believed he and the pigeon were soul mates, and he even said he loves the pigeon-like a man loves a woman. One day, the pigeon flew to his window, and Tesla said he was familiar that knew that she was trying to tell him about his death. He then claimed that rays of light shot out of her eyes and she died. That's not exactly out of character for Tesla because he did hallucinate often in the form of lights.

To sum up, he exhibited eccentric, peculiar, and odd behaviors, did not form close relationships with others (except the pigeon), had very odd beliefs and magical thinking, and also exhibited suspiciousness towards certain things (like the government), unusual perceptual experiences, and of course the hallucinations he would experience. These are all trademarks of schizotypal, but we will never really know what he had, we can only speculate and analyze the behaviors he did exhibit. Most of the behaviors he exhibited, he is declared to have Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) that had little impact on his career but on his personal life. However, he was indeed a strange, brilliant man.

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