



Book Multipliers

How the Best Leaders Make Everyone Smarter

Liz Wiseman and Greg McKeown
HarperBusiness, 2010
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Recommendation

Everyone wants to elicit more from the people with whom they work (or live). Liz Wiseman and her colleague and primary contributor Greg McKeown show you how. They know you can draw more from people by making more of them – by multiplying their contributions. This book names the ways in which managers help others grow to become more than they thought they could be – or halt their growth and make them less than they wanted to be. Anchored in the research of the authors, as well as work from Carol Dweck and multiple-intelligences guru Daniel Goleman, this book will challenge you at every turn, adding value to your work and life. Readers with a natural distrust of dichotomies may question the ease with which the authors find a yang for every yin. For every “Challenger” there is a “Know-It-All.” For every “Investor” there is a “Micromanager.” Instead of being suspicious, think of these opposites as a continuum between those who “Multiply” and those who “Diminish” the talent around them. *BooksInShort* recommends that leaders at all levels follow the suggestion of K.R. Sridhar, CEO of Bloom Energy: “I have zero tolerance if someone does not run the experiment.” If even a single person reports to you, run the experiment. Read the book.

Take-Aways

- Managers can increase or limit their employees’ growth.
- “Diminishers” shut down the potential of others. They shrink the long-term possibilities of their enterprises.
- “Multipliers” inspire boundless productivity from their workforce.
- They require fewer resources to yield greater results.
- “Talent Magnets” multiply by attracting and developing the best workers.
- Some multiply by “Liberating,” creating space for mistakes and learning.
- Some multiply by “Challenging,” inspiring groups to pursue “stretch” opportunities.
- Some multiply by fostering “Debate,” broadcasting many voices and allowing more “fingerprints” to appear on final decisions.
- Some multiply by “Investing,” sharing project ownership and growth opportunities.
- To be a Multiplier, build onto your prominent strength, eliminate your biggest weakness and add layers of the core competencies – slowly but surely.

Summary

“The Multiplier Effect”

If you’ve worked with leaders who are “Diminishers,” you know it. When they run a meeting, they shine and others around them grow dim. This style of leadership isn’t just bad for a team – it’s bad for the entire organization.

Leaders who are “Multipliers” rapidly advance the capacity of their followers, increasing the intelligence of individuals and groups. Productivity and innovation follow.

“It isn’t just how intelligent your team members are; it is how much of that intelligence you can draw out and put to use.”

Research shows that Multipliers draw more effort, energy and achievement from employees. They don’t just access the best people have to offer; they “stretch” the best people have to offer.

Additionally, managers who are Multipliers make resources go further, stimulating a “new corporate logic: Utilize your workers to the fullest and you need not invest in ‘more resources’.”

“Multipliers generate belief – the belief that the impossible is actually possible.”

Answer these questions:

- Do you view intelligence as something just a few people possess?
- When you attend a meeting, do you listen only to those who contributed something in the past?

Answering no marks you as a potential Multiplier. Answering yes means you might be a Diminisher (even if you didn’t imagine you were).

“Corporate environments and modern organizations are the perfect setup for diminishing leadership and have a certain built-in tyranny.”

The distinction matters. Multipliers and Diminishers may treat customers with the same level of care; they both might understand business at a high level. But they differ fundamentally in the ways they approach thinking, talent, challenges, decisions and ownership within their organizations.

Multiplier as “Talent Magnet”

Talent Magnets help people to grow and to prepare for bigger assignments – maybe even their next jobs. Preparing employees to leave your organization might seem counterintuitive, but Talent Magnets know that more talented employees will appear. They have created an environment that attracts them.

“A Talent Magnet creates a powerful force that attracts talent and then accelerates the growth of intelligence and capability.”

Because “Empire Builders” are Diminishers rather than Multipliers, they have a different relationship to talent. They can attract it, but they do nothing to improve talent once it reports for work. Instead, they build up their workforce to bolster their own agendas and images. Talent under their supervision goes unnoticed – they don’t nurture or promote it. People who work for Empire Builders lose their edge and have a difficult time finding their next opportunities.

“In their quest to assemble the finest talent, Talent Magnets are blind to organizational boundaries. They see the multiple forms of intelligence that exist everywhere.”

To avoid being a diminishing Empire Builder, follow the Talent Magnet’s approach:

1. **“Look for talent everywhere”** – Talent Magnets know intelligence comes in many flavors and types; sample them all to deal most productively with the range of problems that beset most organizations.
2. **“Find people’s native genius”** – Learn what skills come easily to your workers so you can identify contributions they can make without exhausting their time or energy.
3. **“Utilize people at their fullest”** – Once you know an area in which people excel, give them an assignment that taps into it. Set them free to do their best work.
4. **“Remove the blockers”** – When you are trying to build up talented people, eliminate anyone who stands in your way. Whatever they contribute, they are not worth the cost.

Multiplier as “Liberator”

Your work environment can limit your ability to share your best ideas. For example, “formal hierarchies” give more weight to the opinions of those on top. If you’re working your way up, compliance with the boss may feel like your only option, especially if you work for a “Tyrant.” These leaders specialize in “intimidation.” They want people to give their best, but they never create an environment where staffers can flourish. Instead, people shut down in the face of the stress that tyrants create.

“Diminishers tell you what they know; Multipliers help you learn what you need to know.”

Liberators, on the other hand, use “intensity” to encourage employees to think hard and do what’s best for the organization. Knowing that “comfort” and “pressure” are not mutually exclusive, leaders who are Liberators do things differently. First, they create a space where great work can transpire, and they resist the urge to use up all that space themselves. Since most organizations are hierarchies, high-ranking Liberators know their opinions wield disproportionate power. So they become “ferocious listeners,” trying constantly to discover other people’s best ideas. They want the best from their staff, but they know they only can obtain it if people have the “ability to focus on the real issues” and contribute fully, openly and honestly.

“Liberators get the best thinking from people by creating a rapid cycle between thinking, learning, and making and recovering from mistakes.”

Second, Liberators “demand people’s best work” and ask for it continuously. Third, they keep learning at the center of what they and their employees do. Mistakes happen and they know it. But people always should learn from their errors – and quickly. Multipliers who act as Liberators generate “rapid learning cycles” in the wake of errors, but Diminishers see only the need to reprimand.

Multiplier as “Challenger”

Working for a “Know-It-All” severely limits a team. When the team hits the edge of the Know-It-All’s knowledge or capabilities, its progress will stop. No one has room to grow in such an environment. Challengers, on the other hand, know how to push a team past its obvious limit. They sniff around for tasks and for opportunities that force people to rise to meet them. Three “practices” guide their behavior:

1. **They “seed” opportunities** – Instead of telling people what to do, Challengers spark interest in projects. They don’t talk about problems; instead, they join people together to explore opportunities.
2. **They “lay down a challenge”** – Challengers make employees excited to try rather than scared to fail. As a result, they find that people are capable of extraordinary things. Challengers help organizations succeed because they ask questions that are “so immense that people can’t answer them based on their current knowledge.” So, they must learn.
3. **They “generate belief”** – Meeting a true challenge isn’t easy, but a Multiplier helps people believe they can find a way to “stretch themselves” to handle it. Additionally, these leaders encourage staffers to “co-create the plan.” This builds buy-in from the start.

“An unsafe environment yields only the safest ideas.”

To challenge others successfully, as a Multiplier would, get out of “answer mode” and boss mode. Be inquisitive. Ask probing questions. Make people think, so that you can move them forward with you – if others won’t follow, then you haven’t challenged them enough to multiply their capacities or their intelligence.

Multiplier as “Debate Maker”

Decisions are a crucial part of every enterprise. Multipliers know how to engage many perspectives and voices, making use of all the intelligence on the team. As Debate Makers, they are interested in accessing the “full brainpower of the organization.” Their polar opposites, “Decision Makers,” call people together not to seek input, but to announce their fiat decisions. They are interested in a small range of intelligence – their own and maybe that of a few key advisers.

“Diminishers give answers. Good leaders ask questions. Multipliers ask the really hard questions.”

When a big decision arrives, Multipliers who function as Debate Makers follow a general pattern to pull more intelligence from more people. First, they establish the ground for broad contributions by giving the decision a proper “frame.” They ask questions that might disrupt the group’s or organization’s typical suppositions. They confirm that the correct people are at the table. Then, they ensure that the participants have an opportunity to “examine the facts and confront reality,” and that their opinions are informed by the right data. Finally, they clarify the decision itself, confirming that everyone who comes to the table knows the reason the decision is important and the way they actually will decide.

“Becoming a Challenger starts with developing an overactive imagination and a serious case of curiosity.”

Once the ground is established, a Multiplier drives the debate, making people feel safe enough to contribute. A Multiplier makes it clear that the results matter. “Evidence” is important, but it must be rooted in fact, not feelings or subjective rationales. The Multiplier ensures that the group considers each member’s perspectives and assumptions. The Multiplier explains, “What will be done” with the team’s ideas. Will the team decide together? If so, how? If the team won’t decide, how does its contribution inform or change the potential decision? Multipliers are not afraid to decide on their own, and they are not solely interested in group agreement. They generate debate to bring the best ideas to the surface. Additionally, debates allow others to “put their fingerprints on the decision,” so they better understand it and are ready to carry it forward.

Multiplier as “Investor”

Diminishers believe that people won’t be able to figure things out without them. These “Micromanagers” jump in and take over at the first sign of a glitch. In contrast, Multipliers who act as Investors put other people in charge, and then invest in their success by teaching, coaching and supplying the needed resources. This enables their staff to work independently and to be held fully accountable for their work and results.

“Multipliers understand that their role is to invest, to teach and to coach, and they keep the accountability for the play with the players. By doing so, they create organizations that can win without them on the field.”

Along the way, Investors are not afraid to make you “stretch,” but they won’t hang you out to dry. They thrive – by helping you thrive – in the teaching mode. They don’t take a problem out of your hands to micromanage it. They want it in your hands – they want you to handle it well, be accountable and generate your best, most “complete” work. This is why they won’t take work back from you. They might give you feedback or coaching; they might even praise you. But they won’t “diminish” you by being overly involved or shielding you from the “natural consequences” of the work that you do or don’t do.

“Multipliers...want to leverage every ounce of intelligence and capability they can in making and executing sound decisions.”

It’s no wonder, then, that when a Micromanager leaves an organization, it falls apart.

When an Investor leaves, a “legacy” flourishes.

“Becoming a Multiplier”

Corporate culture can encourage a Diminisher. Often, either your boss is one or you are, and you’re just too busy to consider changing your mindset, your relationship to your colleagues or how you do your job. Fortunately, you can employ a few “lazy” methods to become a leader more closely aligned with the qualities of a Multiplier.

1. **“Work the extremes”** – If you’re trying to be good at every positive leadership quality, stop. If you have a single, huge, glaring weakness, stop indulging that, too. Take the best thing that you do and do it better. Get rid of the worst thing that you do, or at least bring it into the range where it isn’t harmful.

2. **“Start with assumptions”** – The ideas you assume to be true guide your actions. If you think everyone around you is unintelligent or incompetent, you will likely manage in ways that create a self-fulfilling prophecy. Practice the chief assumption Multipliers hold: “people are smart and will figure it out,” and watch how this belief proves itself true.
3. **Give yourself 30 days** – To start behaving like a Multiplier, in any category, practice a new approach for 30 days. It will become a positive habit.

“It isn’t how much you know that matters. What matters is how much access you have to what other people know.”

This process will get you started. Adding layers over time and working with others on similar goals will move you from being a “genius” to being a “genius maker.”

That changes everything – for you and those around you.

About the Authors

Liz Wiseman, a former executive at Oracle, serves as president of the Wiseman Group, a consultancy where **Greg McKeown** is a partner.
