



THE WORLD NEEDS LEADERS WHO CAN MULTIPLY

Get the most from your employees through great leadership.

By Christine Leonardi

In a weak economy, most organisations need to get more done with fewer resources. This makes it critical to extract the most value out of their existing teams. But, if you think leaders can't expect more from their already stretched employees, think again. New research suggests that multiplier leaders, who have a positive and profitable effect on organisations, get more done with fewer resources, develop and attract talent, cultivate new ideas and energy to drive organisational change and innovation, and, since they bring out the best in everyone around them, effectively double their organisations' workforces for free.

Achieving productivity

The authors of the leadership book *Multipliers: How the Best Leaders Make Everyone Smarter* Liz Wiseman and Greg McKeown, identify two types of leaders: multipliers and diminishers. Each fosters critically different results: multipliers make everyone around them feel and become smarter, while diminishers make everyone around them feel and become dumber.

Companies increasingly rely on employees' brains, not brawn to stay competitive. That's where genius makers who draw out the genius within others to solve many of the complex problems facing business today have an edge, comments Verne Harnish, the founder of two world-renowned entrepreneurship organisations, the Young Entrepreneurs' Organisation (YEO) and the Association of Collegiate Entrepreneurs (ACE). As management icon Peter Drucker noted, management in the 20th century increased the productivity of manual labour in factories fifty-fold at a time when our economy depended more on manufacturing. But, in the 21st century, the most important contribution management needs to make is to increase the productivity of knowledge work and the knowledge worker. Wiseman and McKeown's research found that multipliers get 2,1 times more capability from their workers than diminishers. Harnish says if you factor in an estimated 5% to 10% annual growth bonus, because the same workers become smarter and more capable working for a multiplier, you get the kinds of knowledge worker productivity Drucker had in mind.

The key differences between multipliers and diminishers

In analysing data from 150 leaders on four continents, Wiseman and McKeown identified the above key differences between multipliers and diminishers. Although working for multiplier types can be very positive experiences, Wiseman and McKeown note that bosses like these aren't feel-good types; they have a hard edge: they expect stellar performance from employees and drive individuals to achieve extraordinary results.

Some leaders are ‘accidental’ diminishers

Wiseman and McKeown say diminishers aren’t necessarily mean-spirited or bad people. Many often don’t realise that their words and approaches sap energy and intelligence from their teams. Leaders are often accidental diminishers, who have good intentions, but hold their teams back. They include:

- Visionaries who present and evangelise compelling visions to their teams, but don’t give members enough space to think the challenges through for themselves
- Leaders with the gift of the gab who dominate meetings, thinking their passion is infectious, when in fact, it is stifling
- Creative leaders who continually spout new ideas, thinking they spark the creative process; but, in reality, cause organisational whiplash as people scurry to keep up with every new idea. Wiseman and

McKeown say leaders can avoid being accidental diminishers by:

- Playing your chips sparingly. “Don’t throw all your ideas and suggestions on the table at once. Dispense your thoughts in small but intense doses. By limiting your own comments, you make space for others to contribute – and your words become that much more influential.”
- Asking questions. “Stop worrying about having all the answers. Use your knowledge to ask insightful questions that prompt the members of your team to stop, think, and then rethink.”

Everyone can learn to lead like a multiplier

Wiseman and McKeown’s research frames five multiplier disciplines for success. Multipliers:

1. Attract talented people and deploy them at their highest point of contribution. More important than recruiting talent is fostering a virtuous cycle of attraction, growth, and opportunity by knowing your employees’ capabilities, finding people who know things you don’t and connecting them to the right people and opportunities.
2. Create an intense environment that requires people’s best thinking and work. While multipliers generate an intensity that demands high-level work from their teams, they have a high tolerance for mistakes and understand the importance of learning along the way. They create mental spaces in which people can flourish by explicitly giving people permission to think, speak and act.
3. Define opportunities that cause people to stretch. Multipliers push their people to look beyond what they already know, asking hard questions that create a natural tension that drives people to look for answers. As team members earn small wins, their confidence grows and seemingly insurmountable problems appear less daunting. Roadblocks become interesting puzzles for the team to solve.
4. Drive sound decisions through rigorous debate. Multipliers engage people in rigorous, upfront discussions about the issues at hand. They give people a chance to weigh up and consider different possibilities – ultimately strengthening team members’ understanding of certain issues and increasing the likelihood that they’ll be ready to carry out whatever actions are required.

5. Give people ownership of results and invest in their success. Multipliers see themselves as coaches and teachers. They enable others to operate independently by letting them own their results and rewarding their successes. They put a high premium on self-sufficiency. Once they delegate a task or decision, they don't try to take it back.

Although some people are 'natural' multipliers, Wiseman and McKeown say most leaders fall somewhere in between the two extremes. Becoming more of a multiplier leader starts with changing your assumptions about others.

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