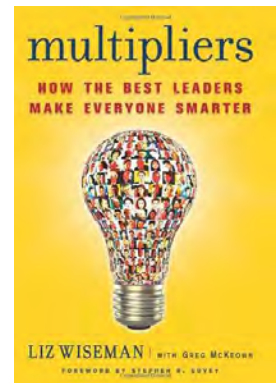


# Are You a Multiplier or Diminisher?

By: Liz Wiseman, Author, *Multipliers: How the Best Leaders Make Everyone Smarter*

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Organizations tend to find smart, talented people and then promote them into management. But many of these people cling to their own capabilities and fail to see and use the full genius of their team. They may be smart leaders, but they shut down the smarts of others and have a draining or diminishing impact. These Diminishers come at a high cost because they waste the talent and intellect of team members, get less than half of the capability of the people around them, and cut the intelligence and capability of their organizations in half at a time when we need leaders who can do more with fewer resources.



Why do some leaders amplify intelligence while others diminish it? We find Diminishers and Multipliers differ in the following ways:

Diminishers include: 1) Empire builders who hoard and underutilize talent; 2) Tyrants who create anxiety and suppress thinking; 3) Know-it-alls who tell people what to do; 4) Decision makers who make isolated decisions; and 5) Micromanagers who take over, control. What they get is less than half of people's capability!

Multipliers include: 1) Talent magnets who attract and optimize talent; 2) Liberators who create intensity that requires best thinking; 3) Challengers who extend challenges; 4) Debate makers who debate before deciding; and 5) Investors who instill ownership and accountability. What they get is 2X capability from people!

## Intelligence Multipliers

Leaders who use their intelligence to amplify the smarts and capabilities of people around them are Multipliers of intelligence—they inspire employees to stretch themselves to deliver results that surpass expectations. These leaders hold a unique set of assumptions about intelligence. Whereas Diminishers see a limited number of smart people and assume that no one else will figure things out without them, Multipliers see an abundance of intelligent people and assume that people are smart and will figure it out.

This core assumption is at the root of the five leadership practices that distinguish Multipliers. They: 1) see genius in others; 2) create intensity that requires best thinking; 3) extend challenges; 4) debate decisions; and 5) instill ownership and accountability.

Multipliers don't get a little more from people around them—they get vastly more. Multipliers utilize people at nearly 100 percent of their capacity, meaning they get twice the capability from their people than Diminishers do. Imagine what is possible if everyone led like a Multiplier and got the full intelligence and capability on their team. Most leaders think they are getting more from their people than they really are.

## Accidental Diminishers

Few Diminishers see the restrictive impact they have on others. Many of them are promoted into management, being praised for their intellectual merit and assuming they are supposed to have all the answers. Others worked

for Diminishers or in diminishing cultures so long that they've gone native. As one high-tech Director said, "I have the heart and mind of a Multiplier, but I've lost my way."

Organizations create hierarchy that is inherently diminishing and causes people to shut down and comply; thus, many well-intended leaders accidentally diminish the smarts of their people. Here are three popular types of Accidental Diminishers:

- **Visionaries:** Visionaries are big thinkers who lay out a compelling picture of the future and evangelize it. But they might be providing too prescriptive a vision to their team and not leaving enough space for others to think through the challenges and build the intellectual muscle to make the vision a reality. Consider the impact of a new VP at a consumer electronics company who was hired to drive growth in an important emerging market. He laid out a bold vision for the business in his region. But instead of engaging his team's enthusiasm, his effect was the opposite—and people became apathetic. One key member of his team put it this way, "there is such a huge gap between what he is telling us to do and what we actually can do, we just give up. We have no idea how we can make his vision a reality."

- **Idea Guys:** Idea Guys are fountains of creativity, and their minds race with non-stop ideas. They may think they're sparking innovation, but they cause whiplash as people scurry to keep up with each new idea, making minor progress in many directions. One product executive would launch a new focus or initiative each week. His director of operations recalled, "He'd tell us on Monday, 'We needed to catch up with Competitor X.'" The organization would scurry, throw a "Hail Mary" pass and make progress for a few days, but then lose traction when they were given a new goal to chase next week.

- **Rescuers:** Many well-intending managers jump in and rescue their people or a project to help the person avert failure and get on the path of success. But when rescuing struggling people, you weaken their ability to think for themselves and to learn how to spot problems and recover from them. Instead of creating a cycle of success, you create chronic dependency on the leader. When a new VP at GAP, Inc. redefined her role as a Multiplier, she stopped jumping in to trouble-shoot problems for her team, shifted the burden of thinking to them, and gave them greater accountability.

Accidental or not, you are not tapping the full brainpower of your team.

## **Lead Like a Multiplier**

How can you stop being a Diminisher and start being a Multiplier? Here are three simple but powerful starting points:

1. **Shift from answers to questions.** Don't provide all the answers—ask the right questions. Use your knowledge of the business or a situation to ask insightful and challenging questions that cause people to stop, think, and rethink. Instead of continually selling your vision, ask the questions that get other people thinking and piecing together that vision for themselves.

2. **Dispense your ideas in small doses.** If you are an idea guy who is prone to toss out more ideas than anyone can catch or have the gift of gab, try dispensing your ideas in small, but intense doses. Introduce fewer ideas, and leave white space. Providing more distance between your ideas creates room for others to contribute; and, people really listen when you say something. Imagine playing your ideas like poker chips, carefully placing each where it creates the most value.

**3. Expect complete work.** People learn best when they are fully accountable and experience the consequences of their work. Instead of jumping in and fixing the work of others, give it back to them and let them know what needs to be improved or completed. Ask people to go beyond pointing out problems: Ask them to find a solution. By wrestling with it, they'll grow their capability and operate more independently.

Intelligence might be your most underutilized asset. If you've cut resources and have fewer people but the same workload, realize that the brainpower needed to solve your most pressing challenges is sitting right in front of you. Spot the ways you might be inadvertently diminishing others and who can become Multipliers who fully utilize and amplify the intelligence and capability of the people around them.