



**PAINFUL LEADERSHIP QUESTION:
ARE YOU A MULTIPLIER
OR DIMINISHER?**

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Does everyone seem to get dumber the longer they work for you?

The most painful leadership book I've ever read is the new bestseller *Multipliers: How the Best Leaders Make Everyone Smarter* by Liz Wiseman and Greg Mckeown. It raises a fundamental question about leadership, one that has been waiting to be named, explored, and finally addressed: As a leader, are you a multiplier or a diminisher?

In asking the question, Wiseman and Mckeown have created a new set of terms that will be with us for a very long time affecting millions. Their premise is that you're either a leader who causes everyone around you to feel and actually become smarter (multiplier) or you're one who causes everyone around you to feel and become dumber (diminisher). It gets to the crux of leadership – especially now that companies rely on the brains of their employees, not their backs, to stay competitive.”

Do you need to be the one in the room seen as having all the answers or do you draw out the genius that's within others in solving many of the complex problems facing business today?

GENIUS OR GENIUS MAKER

The authors ask another important question: “Are you a genius or a genius maker?” Do you need to be the one in the room seen as having all the answers or do you draw out the genius that's within others in solving many of the complex problems facing business today?

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Stephen Covey, of **Seven Habits** fame, makes it clear why genius makers have an edge today when he quotes management icon Peter Drucker in the foreword. Drucker notes that management in the 20th century increased the productivity of manual labor in factories fifty-fold. That was essential at a time when our economy depended more on manufacturing. “The most important contribution management needs to make in the 21st century is similarly to increase the productivity of knowledge work and the knowledge worker,” he explains.

Multipliers do this. Wiseman and Mckeown’s research found that multipliers get 2.1 times more capability from their workers than diminishers. Factor in the 5% to 10% annual growth bonus they estimate because these same workers are getting smarter and more capable working for a multiplier and you get the kinds of knowledge worker productivity Drucker exclaimed is needed this century.

IMPACT ON FAMILY

These same multiplier effects extend to the family. Wiseman and Mckeown share the results from several studies showing how the environment parents create has a direct impact on a child’s IQ.

One specific change my wife and I made, after reading **Multipliers**, is to avoid praising our children for their intelligence and results. For instance, we’ve stopped saying, “You’re so good at math.” The research shows that this actually decreases kids’ confidence as they face tougher problems since they don’t want to disappoint their parents. In many cases, they will simply avoid math altogether when the going gets tough, rather than risk looking dumb.

Instead, the research suggests it’s better to praise children’s hard work and effort. You might say “I appreciate the effort you’re making with these math problems.” This approach increases their ability to reason and to solve more difficult problems. And it

creates a belief, and then a reality, that grows their confidence and intelligence.

So it's not that diminishers are necessarily mean-spirited or bad people (whew!) – it's just that they don't fully understand how their words and approaches sap energy and intelligence from their families and associates. And it's a continuum, with most of us falling somewhere in between the extremes.

STARTS WITH ASSUMPTIONS

The bulk of Wiseman and Mckeown's book focuses on how to become more of a multiplier, offering concrete how-to advice on attitudinal and behavioral changes. It starts with changing your assumptions about others as a leader.

Diminishers basically believe their people “will never figure this out without me” and tend to “use, blame, tell, dictate, and control people,” according to the authors. Multipliers, in turn, believe their people “are smart and will figure this out” and tend to “develop, explore, challenge, consult, and support people.”

In essence, diminishers micromanage their people; multipliers invest in their people.

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5 DISCIPLINES OF MULTIPLIERS

It's no accident that some managers are multipliers. Wiseman and Mckeown frame five disciplines that help them succeed. Multipliers:

- 1) Attract talented people and deploy them at their highest point of contribution
- 2) Create an intense environment that requires people's best thinking and work

So multipliers aren't wimps. They demand and receive outstanding results from their people.

- 3) Define an opportunity that causes people to stretch
- 4) Drive sound decisions through rigorous debate
- 5) Give people ownership of results and invest in their success

So multipliers aren't wimps. They demand and receive outstanding results from their people. It's how you go about it that matters. Read the book and start making changes.

WOMAN AUTHOR

It wasn't lost on me that the lead author of this important book is a woman, a rarity among business best-sellers. My latest glance at the Top 100 business books on Amazon found just five women authors, only two of whom received top billing on the covers. That's equal to the number of dead authors among the Top 100 business books! In a future column I might explore the reasons for this dearth of women wordsmiths.

For now, I'm just happy this book has been written, helping to usher in a decade focused less on stuff and more on people – and doing what we can as leaders to bring out the best in the people we touch at home and at work.