CHAPTER 1

THE MULTIPLIER EFFECT

It has been said that after meeting with the great British Prime Minister William Ewart Gladstone, you left feeling he was the smartest person in the world, but after meeting with his rival Benjamin Disraeli, you left thinking you were the smartest person.[1]

BONO

During the summer of 1987 Gabriel Oz, like virtually all of his peers, entered the army as part of the national military obligation of Israeli citizens to serve in a combat unit. Gabriel, a smart, confident eighteen-year-old with a boisterous laugh, was selected for tank commander instruction and sent to the Golan Heights for basic training.

After six months of training, Gabriel and six of his peers were selected out of basic training for special assignment. There was an urgent need for soldiers to patrol the six-mile-deep belt along the border between Lebanon and Israel. In lieu of completing the remaining three months of basic training, these young soldiers were deployed to Lebanon and would soon experience real combat conditions. Gabriel and his peers faced a complex and chaotic set of battle conditions as they woke the next day in the desert to the sound of gunfire and bombs. Under these intense circumstances, Gabriel worked well with his commanders and was considered a star for his intelligence and his ability to surmise situations quickly and accurately.

After three months of real-world experience, with ten times the amount of in-tank hours that their peers had received at basic training, Gabriel and his fellow soldiers returned to their class in the south of Israel just as the class completed basic training. As they entered the more advanced tank commander training, they experienced a change of command and were assigned to serve under a new commanding officer, Yuval.[2]

Yuval was considered to be the cream of the crop—the top 0.1 percent of talent—and had been fast-tracked through basic training after having left the elite pilot training program due to a medical issue. He was an intelligent and highly skilled tank commander who had just received officer status. But it appeared he still had a reputation to build and something to prove—to Gabriel in particular.

Yuval had a superior knowledge of tank operations and flaunted it as if competing with Gabriel's battlefield savvy. During navigational exercises, Yuval publicly mocked Gabriel and his team's efforts when they failed to find all the designated waypoints. As the scrutiny of their performance continued, Gabriel and his team became less and less capable. Within a week, Gabriel was convinced he couldn't navigate.

In a typical tank maneuver, the tank commander must observe the terrain, find the enemy, command the gunner, aim, shoot, and hit the target—all in rapid succession and while being fired upon by the enemy. Hundreds of things are happening at once that need to be processed, prioritized, decided, and acted upon. Successful completion of these drills requires intense concentration and keen mental aptitude. These maneuvers are particularly intimidating because the commanding officer sits ten inches above the tank commander's head, in a special chair bolted on top of the tank. Commanding officers watch every decision and take constant notes on clipboards attached to their thighs. Gabriel now performed these maneuvers under the wary inspection of Yuval.

In the training field, Gabriel didn't just perform poorly in one maneuver; he nearly failed every maneuver. He was stellar in the classroom, but every time he took command of the tank while Yuval was mounted in the chair, he failed. As Yuval barked orders, controlled every detail, and found every mistake, the tension mounted. Gabriel got tense, couldn't think properly, and struggled to perform.

The failure was so clear that Yuval recommended to the dismissal committee that Gabriel be ejected from the tank commander program. Protocol for dismissal required that Gabriel perform a maneuver under the supervision of the company commander, Lior, the highest-ranking officer in the program. Gabriel considered his fate if he failed officer training and returned to the battlefield with just the rank of a soldier. Gabriel's friends wished him luck in this, the most stressful of situations.

The company commander took Gabriel out for his dismissal test, which consisted of a single maneuver, the Ringo—the most complex maneuver in the test suite. In the Ringo, nothing is scripted and conditions change constantly and unpredictably. Prior to entering the tank, the company commander stopped Gabriel at a model of the battlegrounds. Lior pointed out various aspects of the terrain and said, "Gabriel, what are we going to do here?" And "If the enemy moves here, how will you respond?" Lior was calm and inquisitive. Gabriel no longer felt like he was being tested. He felt like he was learning and working together with Lior to solve a challenge. With Lior now in the chair above him, Gabriel performed the most complex maneuver beautifully—perfectly, even. As Gabriel completed the drill, Lior dismounted from the chair and said, "You are not dismissed."

Gabriel continued with his tank commander training, performing the maneuvers under a different sergeant, all with stellar results. Lior placed Gabriel in the top 10 percent of the class and nominated him to go directly to the officer academy, where he again faced difficult navigational exercises. Interestingly, he found all the waypoints and consistently returned in the top of his class. Curiously, he had become a great navigator once again.

Gabriel completed officer training and was asked to become a *ganan*, Hebrew for a commanding officer who trains or cultivates other officers. He finished his time in the Israeli army as a major and then went on to a successful career in technology, both in Israel and the United States where, incidentally, he found his performance again rising and falling under leaders much like Yuval and Lior.

Gabriel's army experience illustrates that often a change in command can cause a change in capability. Gabriel was smart and capable under one leader, but stupefied with fear under another. What did Yuval say and do that so diminished Gabriel's intelligence and capability? And what did Lior do that restored and expanded Gabriel's ability to reason and navigate complexity?

Some leaders make us better and smarter. They bring out our intelligence. This book is about these leaders, who access and revitalize the intelligence in the people around them. We call them Multipliers. This book will show you why they create genius around them and make everyone smarter and more capable.

QUESTIONING GENIUS

There are bird watchers, and there are whale watchers. I'm a genius watcher. I am fascinated by the intelligence of others. I notice it, study it, and have learned to identify a variety of types of intelligence. Oracle Corporation, the $22 billion software giant, was a great place for genius watching. In the seventeen years I worked in senior management at Oracle, I was fortunate to work alongside many intelligent executives, all systematically recruited from the best companies and out of elite universities as top performers. Because I worked as the vice president responsible for the company's global talent development strategy and ran the corporate university, I worked closely with these executives and had a front-row seat to study their leadership. From this vantage point, I began to observe how they used their intelligence in very different ways, and I became intrigued by the effect they had on the people in their organizations.

The Problem with Genius

Some leaders seemed to drain intelligence and capability out of the people around them. Their focus on their own intelligence and their resolve to be the smartest person in the room had a diminishing effect on everyone else. For them to look smart, other people had to end up looking dumb. We've all worked with these black holes. They create a vortex that sucks energy out of everyone and everything around them. When they walk into a room, the shared IQ drops and the length of the meeting doubles. In countless settings, these leaders were idea killers and energy destroyers. Other people's ideas suffocated and died in their presence and the flow of intelligence came to an abrupt halt around them. Around these leaders, intelligence flowed only one way: from them to others.

Other leaders used their intelligence in a fundamentally different way. They applied their intelligence to amplify the smarts and capability of people around them. People got smarter and better in their presence. Ideas grew; challenges were surmounted; hard problems were solved. When these leaders walked into a room, light bulbs started going off over people's heads. Ideas flew so fast that you had to replay the meeting in slow motion just to see what was going on. Meetings with them were idea mash-up sessions. These leaders seemed to make everyone around them better and more capable. These leaders weren't just intelligent themselves—they were intelligence Multipliers.

Perhaps these leaders understood that the person sitting at the apex of the intelligence hierarchy is the genius maker, not the genius.

Post-Oracle Therapy

The idea for this book emerged from my post-Oracle therapy. Leaving Oracle was like stepping off a high-speed bullet train and suddenly finding everything moving in slow motion. This sudden calm gave way to wonder about the lingering question: How do some leaders create intelligence around them, while others diminish it?

As I began teaching and coaching executives, I saw the same dynamic playing out in other companies. Some leaders seemed to boost the collective IQ while others sucked the mental life out of their employees. I found myself working with highly intelligent executives who were struggling with their own tendency to either overtly or subtly shut down the people around them. I also worked with many senior leaders struggling to make better use of their resources. Most of these leaders had developed their leadership skills during times of growth. However, in a more austere business climate, they found themselves unable to solve problems by simply throwing more resources at the problem. They needed to find ways to boost the productivity of the people they already had.

I recall one particularly pivotal conversation with a client named Dennis Moore, a senior executive with a genius-level IQ. As we discussed how leaders can have an infectious effect on the intelligence in their organization and spark viral intelligence, he responded, "These leaders are like amplifiers. They are intelligence amplifiers."

Yes, certain leaders amplify intelligence. These leaders, whom we have come to call Multipliers, create collective, viral intelligence in organizations. Other leaders act as Diminishers and deplete the organization of crucial intelligence and capability. But what is it that these Multipliers do? What is it that Multipliers do differently than Diminishers?

Scouring business school journals and the Internet looking for answers to these questions, as well as for resources for clients, yielded only frustration. This void set the course for my research into this phenomenon. I was determined to find answers for leaders wanting to multiply the intelligence of their organizations.

The Research

The first major discovery was finding the perfect research partner, Greg McKeown, who was studying at Stanford University's Graduate School of Business. Greg, originally from London, England, had worked as both a management advisor and a leadership development analyst for global companies. Greg has a curious and tenacious mind and a passion for leadership that gave him my same measure of determination to find the answers. After I convinced Greg to divert from a PhD program, we formalized our research effort and went to work. Greg brought rigor to our analysis and our debates and asked the hard questions as we wrote up our findings. He has focused on teaching and testing these ideas inside organizations, which has allowed me to teach and write, giving voice to the ideas I have observed and studied for many years.

We began our formal research by defining the question that would consume us for the next two years: "What are the vital few differences between intelligence Diminishers and intelligence Multipliers, and what impact do they have on organizations?" Waking up for 730 days with the same question was like the movie *Groundhog Day*, in which Bill Murray wakes each day to the same time and song on his alarm clock, destined to repeat the events of the previous day. In the singular and prolonged pursuit of this question, Greg and I began to develop a deep understanding of this Multiplier effect.

We began our research by selecting a set of companies and industries in which individual and organizational intelligence provide a competitive advantage. Because these organizations rise or fall based on the strength of their intellectual assets, we assumed the Multiplier effect would be pronounced. We interviewed senior professionals inside these organizations, asking them to identify two leaders, one who fit the description of a Multiplier and one a Diminisher. We studied more than 150 of the resulting leaders through interviews and a quantitative assessment of their leadership practices. For many leaders, we then followed an intensive 360 degree interview process with both former and current members of their management teams.

As our research expanded, we studied additional leaders from other companies and industries, looking for common elements that spanned the business and nonprofit sectors as well as geographies. Our research journey took us across four continents and introduced us to an incredibly rich and diverse set of leaders. We came to know some of these leaders quite well, studying them and their organizations in depth.

Two of the leaders we studied provided a sharp contrast between these two leadership styles. They both worked for the same company and in the same role. One had the Midas touch of a Multiplier and the other had the chilling effect of a Diminisher.

A TALE OF TWO MANAGERS

Vikram[3] worked as an engineering manager under two different division managers at Intel. Each leader could be considered a genius. Both had a profound impact on Vikram. The first leader was George Schneer, who was a division manager for one of Intel's businesses.

Manager #1: The Midas Touch

George had a reputation for running successful businesses at Intel. Every business he ran was profitable and grew under his leadership. But what most distinguished George was the impact he had on the people around him.

Vikram said, "I was a rock star around George. He *made* me. Because of him I transitioned from an individual contributor to big-time manager. Around him, I felt like a smart SOB—everyone felt like that. He got 100 percent from me—it was exhilarating." George's team echoed the same sentiments: "We are not sure exactly what George did, but we knew we were smart and we were winning. Being on this team was the highlight of our careers."

George grew people's intelligence by engaging it. He wasn't the center of attention and didn't worry about how smart he looked. What George worried about was extracting the smarts and maximum effort from each member of his team. In a typical meeting, he spoke only about 10 percent of the time, mostly just to "crisp up" the problem statement. He would then back away and give his team space to figure out an answer. Often the ideas his team would generate were worth millions. George's team drove the business to achieve outstanding revenue growth and to deliver the profit bridge that allowed Intel to enter the microprocessor business.

Manager #2: The Idea Killer

Several years later, Vikram moved out of George's group and went to work for a second division manager who had been the architect of one of the early microprocessors. This second manager was a brilliant scientist who had now been promoted into management to run the plant that produced the chips. He was highly intelligent by every measure and left his mark on everyone and everything around him.

The problem was that this leader did all the thinking. Vikram said, "He was very, very smart. But people had a way of shutting down around him. He just killed our ideas. In a typical team meeting, he did about 30 percent of the talking and left little space for others. He gave a lot of feedback—most of it was about how bad our ideas were."

This manager made all the decisions himself or with a single confidant. He would then announce those decisions to the organization. Vikram said, "You always knew he would have an answer for everything. He had really strong opinions and put his energy into selling his ideas to others and convincing them to execute on the details. No one else's opinion mattered."

This manager hired intelligent people, but they soon realized that they didn't have permission to think for themselves. Eventually, they would quit or threaten to quit. Ultimately Intel hired a second-in-command to work alongside this manager to counter the intelligence drain on the organization. But even then, Vikram said, "My job was more like cranking than creating. He really only got from me about 50 percent of what I had to offer. And I would *never* work for him again!"

Diminisher or Multiplier?

The second leader was so absorbed in his own intelligence that he stifled others and diluted the organization's crucial intelligence and capability. George brought out the intelligence in others and created collective, viral intelligence in his organization. One leader was a genius. The other was a genius maker.

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

We’ve all experienced these two types of leaders. What type of leader are you right now? Are you a genius, or are you a genius maker?

THE MULTIPLIER EFFECT

Multipliers are genius makers. Everyone around them gets smarter and more capable. People may not become geniuses in a traditional sense, but Multipliers invoke each person’s unique intelligence and create an atmosphere of genius—innovation, productive effort, and collective intelligence.

In studying Multipliers and Diminishers, we learned that at the most fundamental level, they get dramatically different results from their people, they hold a different logic and set of assumptions about people’s intelligence, and they do a small number of things very differently. Let’s first examine the impact of the Multipliers—why people get smarter and more capable around them and why they get twice as much from their resources as do the Diminishers. We call this the Multiplier effect.

Because Multipliers are leaders who look beyond their own genius and focus their energy on extracting and extending the genius of others, they get more from their people. They don’t get a little more; they get vastly more.

2X Multiplier Effect

The impact of a Multiplier can be seen in two ways: first, from the point of view of the people they work with and second, from the point of view of the organizations they shape and create. Let’s begin by examining how Multipliers influence the people who work around them.

Extracting Intelligence

Multipliers extract all of the capability from people. In our interviews, people told us that Multipliers got *a lot* more out of them than Diminishers. We asked each person to identify the percentage of their capability that a Diminisher received from them. The numbers typically ranged between 20 and 50 percent. When we asked them to identify the percentage of their capability that the Multiplier extracted, the numbers typically fell between 70 and 100 percent.[4] When we compared the two sets of data, we were amazed to find that Multipliers got 1.97 times more. That represents an almost twofold increase or a 2X effect. After concluding our formal research, we continued to pose this question in workshops and with management teams, asking people to reflect on their past Multiplier and Diminisher bosses. Across industries and in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors, we continued to find that Multipliers get at least two times more from people.

What could you accomplish if you could get twice as much from your people?

The reason for the difference is that when people work with Multipliers, they hold nothing back. They offer the very best of their thinking, creativity, and ideas. They give more than their jobs require and volunteer their discretionary effort, energy, and resourcefulness. They actively search for more valuable ways to contribute. They hold themselves to the highest standards. They give 100 percent of their abilities to the work—and then some.

Extending Intelligence

Not only do Multipliers extract capability and intelligence from people, they do it in a way that extends and grows that intelligence. In our interviews people often said Multipliers accessed *more* than 100 percent of their capability. They would say, "Oh, they got 120 percent from me." Initially, I pushed back, citing that getting more than 100 percent is mathematically impossible. But we continued to hear people claim Multipliers got more than 100 percent from them. Greg pushed this issue, suggesting this pattern was an important data point. We began to ask: Why would people insist that intelligence Multipliers got more out of them than they actually had?

Our research confirmed that Multipliers not only access people's current capability, they stretch it. They get more from people than they knew they had to give. People reported actually getting smarter around Multipliers. The implication is that intelligence itself can grow.

This is an insight that is corroborated by other recent research into the extensible nature of intelligence. Consider a few recent studies:

- Carol Dweck of Stanford University has conducted ground-breaking research that found that children given a series of progressively harder puzzles and praised for their intelligence stagnate for fear of reaching the limit of their intelligence. Children given the same series of puzzles but then praised for their hard work actually increased their ability to reason and to solve problems. When these children were recognized for their efforts to think, they created a belief, and then a reality, that intelligence grows.[5]
- Eric Turkheimer of the University of Virginia has found that bad environments suppress children's IQs. When poor children were adopted into upper-middle-class households, their IQs rose by 12 to 18 points.[6]
- Richard Nisbett of the University of Michigan has reviewed studies that show: 1) students' IQ levels drop over summer vacation, and 2) IQ levels across society have steadily increased over time. The average IQ of people in 1917 would amount to a mere 73 on today's IQ test.[7]

After reading these studies, I took Greg's advice and recalculated the data from our research interviews at face value, using the literal percentage of capability that people claimed Multipliers received from them. When factoring this excess capability (the amount beyond 100 percent) into our calculations, we found that Multipliers actually get 2.1 times more than Diminishers. What if you not only got 2X more from your team—what if you could get everything they had to give plus a 5 to 10 percent growth bonus because they were getting smarter and more capable while working for you?

This 2X effect is a result of the deep leverage Multipliers get from their resources. When you extrapolate the 2X Multiplier effect to the organization, you begin to see the strategic relevance. Simply said, resource leverage creates competitive advantage.

Resource Leverage

When Tim Cook, COO of Apple Inc., opened a budget review in one sales division, he reminded the management team that the strategic imperative was revenue growth. Everyone expected this but they were astounded when he asked for the growth *without* providing additional headcount. The sales executive at the meeting said he thought the revenue target was attainable but only *with* more headcount. He suggested they follow a proven linear model of incremental headcount growth, insisting that everyone knows that more revenue means you need more headcount. The two executives continued the conversation for months, never fully able to bridge their logic. The sales executive was speaking the language of addition (that is, higher growth by adding more resources). The COO was speaking the language of multiplication (that is, higher growth by better utilizing the resources that already exist).

The Logic of Addition

This is the dominant logic that has existed in corporate planning: that resources will be added when new requests are made. Senior executives ask for more output and the next layer of operational leaders request more headcount. The negotiations go back and forth until everyone settles on a scenario such as: 20 percent more output with 5 percent more resources. Neither the senior executive nor the operational leaders are satisfied.

Operational leaders entrenched in the logic of resource allocation and addition argue:

1. Our people are overworked.
2. Our best people are the most maxed out.
3. Therefore, accomplishing a bigger task requires the addition of more resources.

This is the logic of addition. It seems persuasive but, importantly, it ignores the opportunity to more deeply leverage existing resources. The logic of addition creates a scenario in which people become both overworked *and* underutilized. To argue for allocation without giving attention to resource leverage is an expensive corporate norm.

Business school professors and strategy gurus Gary Hamel and C.K. Prahalad have written, “The resource allocation task of top management has received too much attention when compared to the task of resource leverage.... If top management devotes more effort to assessing the strategic feasibility of projects in its allocation role than it does to the task of multiplying resource effectiveness, its value-added will be modest indeed.”[8]

Picture a child at a buffet line. They load up on food, but a lot of it is left on the plate uneaten. The food gets picked at and pushed around, but it is left to go to waste. Like these children, Diminishers are eager to load up on resources, and they might even get the job done, but many people are left unused; their capability wasted. Consider the costs of one high-flying product development executive at a technology firm.

THE HIGH-COST DIMINISHER Jasper Wallis[9] talked a good game. He was smart and could articulate a compelling vision for his products and their transformational benefits for customers. Jasper was also politically savvy and knew how to play politics. The problem was that Jasper’s organization could not execute and realize the promise of his vision because they were in a perpetual spin cycle, spinning around him.

Jasper was a strategist and an idea man. However, his brain worked faster and produced more ideas than his organization could execute. Every week or so, he would launch a new focus or a new initiative. His director of operations recalled, “He’d tell us on Monday, we needed to catch up with ‘competitor X,’ and we needed to get it done this week.” The organization would scurry, throw a “Hail Mary” pass, and make progress for a few days, and then eventually lose traction when they were given a new goal to chase the following week.

This leader was so heavily involved in the details that he became a bottleneck in the organization. He worked extremely hard, but his organization moved slowly. His need to micromanage limited what the rest of the organization could contribute. His need to put his personal stamp on everything wasted resources and meant his division of 1,000 was only operating at about 500 strong.

Jasper’s modus operandi was to compete for resources with a larger division in the company that produced similar technology. Jasper’s overriding goal was to outsize the other division. He hired people at a breakneck pace and built his own internal infrastructure and staff—all of which was redundant with infrastructure that existed in the other division. He even convinced the company to build a dedicated office tower for his division.

Things eventually caught up with Jasper. It became clear that his products were hype and the company was losing market share. When the real return on investment (ROI) calculation was made, he was removed from the company and his division was folded into the other product group. The duplicate infrastructure he built was eventually removed, but only after many millions of dollars had been wasted and opportunities lost in the market.

Diminishers come at a high cost.

The Logic of Multiplication

We have examined the logic of addition and the resource inefficiencies that follow. Better leverage and utilization of resources at the organizational level require adopting a new corporate logic. This new logic is one of multiplication. Instead of achieving linear growth by adding new resources, you can more efficiently extract the capability of your people and watch growth skyrocket.

Leaders rooted in the logic of multiplication believe:

1. Most people in organizations are underutilized.

2. All capability can be leveraged with the right kind of leadership.

3. Therefore, intelligence and capability can be multiplied without requiring a bigger investment.

For example, when Apple Inc. needed to achieve rapid growth with flat resources in one division, they didn't expand their sales force. Instead, they gathered the key players across the various job functions, took a week to study the problem, and collaboratively developed a solution. They changed the sales model to utilize competency centers and better leverage their best salespeople and deep industry experts in the sales cycle. They achieved year-over-year growth in the double digits with virtually flat resources.

Salesforce.com, a $1 billion software firm that has pioneered software as a service, has been making the shift from the logic of addition to the logic of multiplication. They enjoyed a decade of outstanding growth using the old idea of “throwing resources at a problem.” They addressed new customers and new demands by hiring the best technical and business talent available and deploying them on the challenges. However, a strained market environment created a new imperative for the company’s leadership: get more productivity from their currently available resources. They could no longer operate on outdated notions of resource utilization. They started developing leaders who could multiply the intelligence and capability of the people around them and increase the brainpower of the organization to meet their growth demands.

Resource leverage is a far richer concept than just “accomplish more with less.” Multipliers don’t necessarily get more with less. They get more by using more—more of people’s intelligence and capability. As one CEO put it, “Eighty people can either operate with the productivity of fifty or they can operate as though they were five hundred.” And because these Multipliers achieve better resource efficiency, they enjoy a strengthened competitive position against companies entrenched in the logic of addition.

This book strikes at the root of this outdated logic. To begin to see how, we will turn to the question of how Multipliers access intelligence and get so much from people. The answer, we found, is in the mindset and the five disciplines of the Multiplier.

THE MIND OF THE MULTIPLIER

As we studied both Diminishers and Multipliers, we consistently found that they hold radically different assumptions about the intelligence of the people they work with. These assumptions appear to explain much of the difference in how Diminishers and Multipliers operate.

THE MIND OF THE DIMINISHER The Diminisher’s view of intelligence is based on elitism and scarcity. Diminishers appear to believe that *really intelligent people are a rare breed* and *I am one of the few really smart people*. They then conclude, *other people will never figure things out without me*.

I recall a leader I worked with whom I can only describe as an “intellectual supremacist.” This senior executive ran a technology organization of over 4,000 highly educated knowledge workers. Most of these employees were graduates of top universities from around the world. I joined one of his management meetings in which twenty members of his senior management team were troubleshooting an important go-to-market problem for one of their products. As we walked out of the meeting, we were reflecting on the conversation and the decisions made. He stopped, turned to me, and calmly said, “In meetings, I typically only listen to a couple of people. No one else really has anything to offer.” I think he saw the alarm on my face because after his words came out, he added the awkward postscript, “Well, of course you are one of these people.” I doubted it. Out of the top twenty managers representing a division of 4,000 people, he believed only a couple had anything to offer. As we walked down the hallway, we passed by rows and rows of cubicles and offices occupied by his staff. Seen through new eyes, this expanse now suddenly looked like a massive brainpower wasteland. I wanted to make a public announcement and tell them all that they could go home since their senior executive didn’t think they had much to offer.

In addition to assuming intelligence is a scarce commodity, Diminishers see intelligence as static, meaning it doesn’t change over time or circumstance. Our research showed that Diminishers see intelligence as something basic about a person that can’t change much. This is consistent with what Dr. Carol Dweck, noted psychologist and author, calls a “fixed mindset,” which is a belief that one’s intelligence and qualities are carved in stone.[10] Diminishers’ two-step logic appears to be *people who don’t “get it” now*, *never will*; therefore, *I’ll need to keep doing the thinking for everyone*. In the Diminisher world, there is no vacation for the smart people!

You can probably predict how the executive described above actually operated on a day-to-day basis. You might ask yourself how *you* would operate if, deep down, you held these beliefs. You would probably tell people what to do, make all the important decisions, and jump in and take over when someone appeared to be failing. And in the end, you would almost always be right, because your assumptions would cause you to manage in a way that produced subordination and dependency.

THE MIND OF THE MULTIPLIER Multipliers hold very different assumptions. Multipliers have a rich view of the intelligence of the people around them. If Diminishers see the world of intelligence in black and white, Multipliers see it in Technicolor. They don't see a world where just a few people deserve to do the thinking; Multipliers see intelligence as continually developing. This observation is consistent with what Dweck calls a "growth mindset," which is a belief that basic qualities like intelligence and ability can be cultivated through effort.[11] They assume: *people are smart and will figure it out.* They see their organization as full of talented people who are capable of contributing at much higher levels. They think like one manager we interviewed who takes stock of her team members by asking herself, *In what way is this person smart?* In answering this question, she finds colorful capabilities often hidden just below the surface. Instead of writing people off as not worth her time, she is able to ask, What could be done to develop and grow these capabilities? She then finds an assignment that both stretches the individual and furthers the interests of the organization.

Such Multipliers look at the complex opportunities and challenges swirling around them and assume: *there are smart people everywhere who will figure this out and get even smarter in the process*. Therefore, they conclude that their job is to bring the right people together in an environment that liberates people's best thinking and then to get out of their way.

How would you operate if you held these assumptions? In the most trying times, you would trust your people; you would extend hard challenges to them and allow them space to fulfill their responsibilities. You would access their intelligence in a way that would actually make them smarter.

The chart below summarizes how these very different sets of assumptions have a powerful effect on the way Diminishers and Multipliers lead others:

How would you:: Manage talent?
Diminisher "They will never figure this out without me.": Use
Multiplier "People are smart and will figure this out.": Develop

How would you:: Approach mistakes?
Diminisher "They will never figure this out without me.": Blame
Multiplier "People are smart and will figure this out.": Explore

How would you:: Set direction?
Diminisher "They will never figure this out without me.": Tell
Multiplier "People are smart and will figure this out.": Challenge

How would you:: Make decisions?
Diminisher "They will never figure this out without me.": Decide
Multiplier "People are smart and will figure this out.": Consult

How would you:: Get things done?
Diminisher "They will never figure this out without me.": Control
Multiplier "People are smart and will figure this out.": Support

These core assumptions are essential to unearth and understand because, quite simply, behavior follows assumptions. If someone wants to lead like a Multiplier, he or she can't simply mimic the practices of the Multiplier. An aspiring Multiplier must start by thinking like a Multiplier. In twenty years of watching and coaching executives, I have observed how leaders' assumptions affect their management. When someone begins by examining and potentially upgrading their core assumptions, they will more easily adopt the five disciplines of the Multiplier with authenticity and impact.

THE FIVE DISCIPLINES OF THE MULTIPLIER

So what are the practices that distinguish the Multiplier? In analyzing data on over 150 leaders, we found a number of areas in which Multipliers and Diminishers do the same thing. They both are customer driven. Both have strong business acumen and market insight. Both surround themselves with smart people, and both consider themselves thought leaders. However, as we searched the data for the active ingredients unique to Multipliers, we found five disciplines in which Multipliers differentiate themselves from Diminishers.

1. ATTRACT AND OPTIMIZE TALENT. Multipliers lead people by operating as *Talent Magnets*, whereby they attract and deploy talent to its fullest regardless of who owns the resource. People flock to work with them directly or otherwise because they know they will grow and be successful. In contrast, Diminishers operate as *Empire Builders*, insisting that they must own and control resources to be more productive. They tend to divide resources into those they own and those they don't, allowing these artificial separations to hamstring effective use of all resources.

People may initially be attracted to work with a Diminisher, but it is often the place where people's careers die.

The Diminisher is an Empire Builder. The Multiplier is a Talent Magnet.

2. CREATE INTENSITY THAT REQUIRES BEST THINKING. Multipliers establish a unique and highly motivating work environment where everyone has permission to think and the space to do their best work. Multipliers operate as *Liberators*, producing a climate that is both comfortable *and* intense. They remove fear and create the safety that invites people to do their best thinking. But they also create an intense environment that demands people's best effort. In contrast, Diminishers operate as *Tyrants*, introducing a fear of judgment that has a chilling effect on people's thinking and work. They demand people's best thinking, yet they don't get it.

The Diminisher is a Tyrant. The Multiplier is a Liberator.

3. EXTEND CHALLENGES. Multipliers operate as *Challengers* by seeding opportunities, laying down a challenge that stretches an organization, and generating belief that it can be done. In this way, they challenge themselves and others to push beyond what they know. In contrast, Diminishers operate as *Know-It-Alls*, personally giving directives to showcase their knowledge. While Diminishers set direction, Multipliers ensure direction gets set.

The Diminisher is a Know-It-All. The Multiplier is a Challenger.

4. DEBATE DECISIONS. Multipliers make decisions in a way that readies the organization to execute those decisions. They operate as *Debate Makers*, driving sound decisions through rigorous debate. They engage people in debating the issues up front, which leads to decisions that people understand and can execute efficiently. In contrast, Diminishers operate as *Decision Makers* who tend to make decisions efficiently within a small inner circle, but they leave the broader organization in the dark to debate the soundness of the decision instead of executing it.

The Diminisher is a Decision Maker. The Multiplier is a Debate Maker.

5. INSTILL OWNERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY. Multipliers deliver and sustain superior results by inculcating high expectations across the organization. By serving as *Investors*, Multipliers provide necessary resources for success. In addition, they hold people accountable for their commitments. Over time, Multipliers' high expectations turn into an unrelenting presence, driving people to hold themselves and each other accountable, often to higher standards and without the direct intervention of the Multiplier. In contrast, Diminishers serve as *Micromanagers* who drive results by holding on to ownership, jumping into the details, and directly managing for results.

The Diminisher is a Micromanager. The Multiplier is an Investor.

The following chart summarizes the five vital disciplines that differentiate Diminishers and Multipliers:

THE 5 DISCIPLINES OF THE MULTIPLIERS

Diminisher

The Empire Builder: Hoards resources and underutilizes talent

The Tyrant: Creates a tense environment that suppresses people's thinking and capability

The Know-It-All: Gives directives that showcase how much they know

The Decision Maker: Makes centralized, abrupt decisions that confuse the organization

The Micro Manager: Drives results through their personal involvement

Multiplier

The Talent Magnet: Attracts talented people and uses them at their highest point of contribution

The Liberator: Creates an intense environment that requires people's best thinking and work

The Challenger: Defines an opportunity that causes people to stretch

The Debate Maker: Drives sound decisions through rigorous debate

The Investor: Gives other people the ownership for results and invests in their success

SURPRISING FINDINGS

As we studied Multipliers across the world, we found a remarkable amount of consistency and several patterns that confirmed our early observations. But here are three findings that were surprising and intriguing.

A Hard Edge

One of the most critical insights from our study of Multipliers is how hard edged these managers are. They expect great things from their people and they drive people to achieve extraordinary results. They are beyond results-driven managers. They are tough and exacting. Indeed, Multipliers make people feel smart and capable; but Multipliers aren't "feel-good" managers. They look into people and find capability, and they want to access all of it. They utilize people to their fullest. They see a lot, so they expect a lot.

During our research interviews, people oozed appreciation for the Multipliers they had worked with, but the gratitude was rooted in the deep satisfaction found in working with them, not in the pleasantries of a relationship. One person described working with Deb Lange, a senior vice president of taxation at a large firm: "Working with her was like an intense workout. It was exhausting but totally exhilarating." Another said of his manager: "He got things from me I didn't know I had to give. I would do almost anything to not disappoint him."

The Multiplier approach to management isn't just an enlightened view of leadership. It is an approach that delivers higher performance because it gets vastly more out of people and returns to them a richly satisfying experience. As one early reader of this book noted, these leaders aren't about "cupcakes and kisses."

A Great Sense of Humor

It turns out that Multipliers have a great sense of humor. On a whim we added "Great Sense of Humor" to our leadership survey. Our suspicion proved right. Not only is this trait prominent among Multipliers, it is one of the traits that is most negatively correlated with the mindset held by Diminishers. Multipliers aren't necessarily comedians, but they don't take themselves or situations too seriously. Perhaps because they don't need to defend their own intelligence, Multipliers can laugh at themselves and see comedy in error and in life's foibles. Their sense of humor liberates others.

The humor of the Multiplier is very George Clooney–esque—a self-depreciating wit and an ability to put others at ease, allowing people to be themselves. As one journalist wrote of Clooney, "After fifteen minutes, he made me feel comfortable in my own house."[12] A Clooney costar said, "He has a way of daring you…which can be irresistible." Multipliers use humor to create comfort and to spark a natural energy and intelligence in others.

The Accidental Diminisher

Perhaps one of our biggest surprises was realizing how few Diminishers understood the restrictive impact they were having on others. Most of the Diminishers had grown up praised for their personal intelligence and had moved up the management ranks on account of personal—and often intellectual—merit. When they became "the boss," they assumed it was their job to be the smartest and to manage a set of "subordinates." Others had once had the mind and even the heart of the Multiplier, but they had been working among Diminishers for so long that they inherited many of their practices and absorbed their worldview. As one executive put it, "When I read your findings, I realized that I have been living in Diminisher land so long that I have gone native." Many people have worked for Diminishers and, although they may have escaped unscathed, they carry some of the residual effects in their own leadership. The good news for the Accidental Diminisher is that there is a viable path to becoming a Multiplier.

THE PROMISE OF THIS BOOK

As we studied Multipliers and Diminishers, we heard case after case of smart individuals being underutilized by their leaders. We heard their frustration as they told us how little some leaders got from them, despite how hard they were working and how they tried to give more. We learned that it is indeed possible to be both overworked and underutilized. Latent talent exists everywhere. Organizations are replete with underchallenged masses.

Multipliers are out there. Multipliers know how to find this dormant intelligence, challenge it, and put it to use at its fullest. They exist in business, in education, in nonprofits, and in government. Consider just a few that you will learn more about later.

1. Narayana Murthy, founder and chairman of India-based Infosys Technologies, who led the company over a twenty-year period, growing revenue to $4.6 billion and becoming one of India's largest and most successful companies (with over 100,000 professionals) by hiring people smarter than himself, giving them room to contribute, and building a management team that would succeed him without skipping a beat.

2. Sue Siegel, former biotech president turned venture capitalist for Mohr Davidow Ventures (MDV), whose partner says, "There is a Sue effect. Everything around her gets better and companies grow under her guidance. I often wonder what people are like when they aren't around Sue."

3. Lutz Ziob, general manager of Microsoft Learning, whose team says of him, "He creates an environment where good things happen. He recruits great people, allows them to make mistakes, and ferociously debates the important decisions. He demands our best, but then shares the success with the whole team."

4. Larry Gelwix, head coach of Highland Rugby, whose high school varsity team's record is 392 wins and just nine losses in thirty-four years. He attributes this extraordinary record to a deliberate leadership philosophy that engages the intelligence of his players on and off the field.

5. K.R. Sridhar, successful green-tech entrepreneur and CEO, who recruits *A+* talent, then gives them an environment with a lot of pressure but very little stress, and allows them to experiment and take risks until the right technology and solutions emerge.

Leaders like these provide an aspiration point for those who would be Multipliers.

The promise of this book is simple: You can be a Multiplier. You can create genius around you and receive a higher contribution from your people. You can choose to think like a Multiplier and operate like one. This book will show you how. And it will show you why it matters.

This is a book for every manager trying to navigate the resource strain of tough economic times. It is a message for leaders who must accomplish more by getting more out of their people. As companies shed excess resources, the need for leaders who can multiply the intelligence and capability around them is more vital than ever. This book is also for the raging Multiplier who seeks to better understand what he or she does naturally. It is for the aspiring Multiplier who wishes to get the full capability and intelligence from his or her people. And it is most certainly for the Diminishers, so they can better understand the negative effects of leadership centered on their own intelligence. It is for every manager seeking the promise of the Multiplier: to increase intelligence everywhere and with everyone.

As you read this book, you will find a few central messages:

1. Diminishers underutilize people and leave capability on the table.
2. Multipliers increase intelligence in people and in organizations. People actually get smarter and more capable around them.
3. Multipliers leverage their resources. Corporations can get 2X more from their resources by turning their most intelligent

resources into intelligence Multipliers.

Before turning our attention to the practices of the Multiplier, let's clarify what this book is not. This book is not a prescription for a nice-guy, feel-good model of leadership. It is a hard-edged approach to management that allows people to contribute more of their abilities. And although there will be much discussion of Multipliers and Diminishers, this book isn't about what they achieve themselves. It is about the impact that these leaders have on others. It is about the impact and the promise of the Multiplier. And lastly, the ideas offered in this book are not intended to be terms for labeling your diminishing boss and your colleagues. Rather, it is offered as a framework for helping you to develop the practices of a Multiplier.

This book has been designed as an end-to-end learning experience, offering an opportunity to both understand and implement the Multiplier ideas. This introduction has provided a first glance into the Multiplier effect and an overview of what Multipliers do. The successive chapters will clarify the differences between Multipliers and Diminishers and will present the five disciplines of the Multiplier. You will read stories of real Multipliers and Diminishers; be aware that we've changed the Diminishers' names (and companies) for rather obvious reasons. The book concludes with a road map for becoming a Multiplier.

MY CHALLENGE TO YOU

Although the Multiplier/Diminisher framework might appear binary, I wish to emphasize that there is a continuum between Multipliers and Diminishers, with just a small number of people at either polar extreme. Our research showed that most of us fall along this spectrum and have the ability to move toward the side of the Multiplier. With the right intent, the Multiplier approach to leadership can be developed. The good news is that 1) Multipliers are out there, 2) we have studied them to uncover their secrets, and 3) you can learn to become one. And not only can you become a Multiplier yourself, you can find and create other Multipliers. That will make you a multiplier of Multipliers.

It is within this context that I challenge you to read this book at several levels. At the most fundamental level, you might read it to illuminate what you undoubtedly have experienced—that some leaders create genius while others destroy it. Or you might go beyond this and read to reflect on the quintessential Multipliers and Diminishers that have been part of your career and life experience. But perhaps the best way to approach this book is to look beyond the idea that you or your colleagues are Multipliers, and instead spot yourself at times in the anatomy of a Diminisher. The greatest power of these ideas might be in realizing that you have the mind of a Multiplier but that you've been living in a Diminisher world and you've lost your way. Perhaps you are an Accidental Diminisher.

As Greg and I have journeyed into the world of Multipliers and Diminishers, we have often seen glimpses of ourselves—either in the present or from years past—and have found ways to better exemplify the Multiplier in our own work teaching and coaching leaders around the world.

The book is a guide to those of you who wish to follow the path of the Multiplier and, like British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli, leave those you meet thinking they, rather than you, are the smartest person in the world. It is a book for executives who want to seed their organization with more Multipliers and watch everyone and everything get better.

Let me now introduce you to the fascinating and diverse set of leaders we call the Multipliers. They come from all walks of life—from corporate board rooms, to our schools' classrooms, and from the Oval Office to the fields of Africa. We've selected leaders who represent diverse ideologies. I encourage you to learn from everyone, even those whose political views you do not share. I hope you will find their stories, their practices, and their impact as inspiring as we did when we entered their worlds.

THE MULTIPLIER FORMULA

MULTIPLIERS VERSUS DIMINISHERS

MULTIPLIERS: These leaders are genius makers and bring out the intelligence in others. They build collective, viral intelligence in organizations.

DIMINISHERS: These leaders are absorbed in their own intelligence, stifle others, and deplete the organization of crucial intelligence and capability.

The Five Disciplines of the Multipliers

1. *The Talent Magnet:* Attract and optimize talent
2. *The Liberator:* Require people's best thinking
3. *The Challenger:* Extend challenges
4. *The Debate Maker:* Debate decisions
5. *The Investor:* Instill accountability

The Results

By extracting people's full capability, Multipliers get twice the capability from people than do Diminishers.

CHAPTER 3

THE LIBERATOR

The only freedom that is of enduring importance is the freedom of intelligence, that is to say, freedom of observation and of judgment.

JOHN DEWEY

Michael Chang[1] began his career in a small consulting company. As a young manager, he was forceful with his opinion and erred toward brutal honesty. Over time, he saw its damaging effects and reflected, "It certainly doesn't get people to blossom."

As Michael gained leadership experience, he began to realize that when you become the leader, the center of gravity is no longer yourself. He had a mentor who taught him that the leader's job is to put other people on stage. He began to shift his focus to others, and he became less controlling and learned to give people space. Where he used to jump in and do it for them, he learned to hold back. He found that not only do other people step up, they often surprise you by producing something better than you would have. As he has grown as a leader, he's learned to be direct without being destructive. He's learned how to create an environment where he could tell the truth and have others grow from it.

Today, this manager is the CEO of a thriving start-up company. He has developed several practices that give space for others to do their best work. He makes a conscious effort to create a learning environment by recruiting people with a strong learning orientation and then often admitting his own mistakes. This gives others permission to make and recover from their own mistakes. When offering his opinion, he distinguishes "hard opinions" from "soft opinions." Soft opinions signal to his team: *here are some ideas for you to consider in your own thinking*. Hard opinions are reserved for times when he holds a very strong view.

Here's a leader who began his career headed down the path of a management tyrant but who has become a Multiplier and Liberator himself. The accomplishment is significant when you consider the path of least resistance for most smart, driven leaders is to become a Tyrant. Even Michael said, "It's not like it isn't temping to be tyrannical when you can."

Let's face it. Corporate environments and modern organizations are the perfect setup for diminishing leadership and have a certain built-in tyranny. The org charts, the hierarchy, the titles, the approval matrixes skew power toward the top and create incentives for people to shut down and comply. In any hierarchical organization, the playing field is rarely level. The senior leaders stand on the high side of the field and ideas and policies roll easily down to the lower side. Policies—established to create order—often unintentionally keep people from thinking. At best, these policies limit intellectual range of motion as they straitjacket the thinking of the followers. At worst, these systems shut down thinking entirely.

These hierarchical structures make it easy for Tyrants to reign. And in their reign, these managers can easily suppress and constrain the thinking of the people around them.

Consider the fate of Kate, a corporate manager who began her career as an intelligent, driven, and creative collaborator. She was promoted into management and moved quickly from front-line manager to vice president and is now running a large organization. She still sees herself as an open-minded, creative thought leader. But in a recent 360 degree feedback report, she was shocked to find that her people don't seem to agree. As she read the report, she could see that her strong ideas were hampering the creativity and capability of her people. And her drive for results was making it difficult for people to be truthful and take risks. One of the comments read, "It is just easier to hold back and let Kate do the thinking." Kate was stunned.

Every step she had taken up the corporate ladder made it that much easier for her to unintentionally kill other people's ideas. The nature of the hierarchy had skewed power, making every conversation Kate had with a subordinate inherently unequal. The playing field was tilted in her favor. An off-the-cuff remark could be translated as a strong opinion and turned into policy for her division. If she rolled her eyes or sighed sharply after someone's comment, everyone in the room noticed and avoided saying anything they thought would produce the same reaction.

She had more power than she had realized. She had become an Accidental Diminisher.

I suspect I saw too many military movies in college because they all started to look alike. Inevitably there would be a scene where an army private who was privy to some debacle would stand at attention and nervously appeal to the commanding officer, “Permission to speak freely, sir?” I could never understand this strange custom and why someone would need permission to speak freely. After all, I was in college where thinking and speaking freely was the norm. However, after several years in the workplace, I clearly understood. Formal hierarchies suppressed the voices, and often ideas, of those at the bottom.

Multipliers liberate people from the oppressive forces within corporate hierarchy. They liberate people to think, to speak, and to act with reason. They create an environment where the best ideas surface and where people do their best work. They give people permission to think.

THE TYRANT VERSUS THE LIBERATOR

Multipliers create an intense environment in which superior thinking and work can flourish. Tyrants create a tense environment that suppresses people’s thinking and capability.

A Tense Leader

Jenna Healy was an SVP of field operations for a large telecommunications company. She was a serious leader who even at five feet, three inches had a way of towering over the people who worked for her. Jenna was a smart manager with strong experience, but Jenna was an absolute Tyrant.

Her colleagues said, “She created an environment of hysteria. She created fear all around her and intimidated and bullied people until she got what she wanted. Her primary approach to leadership was ‘What more can you do for me?’” When one of her managers said, “She’s a bit like the ruthless Miranda Priestly in *The Devil Wears Prada*,” I got the picture immediately.

Not only was Jenna a bully, but she struck at random. It was hard to predict what would set her off or who would be the next victim. One person recalled, “You felt like you could be the next guy. I was stressed, on the edge, and at risk around her.” Her colleagues joked, “There needs to be a storm warning system for Jenna. People need to know when it is time to duck and cover.”

Jenna’s quarterly management meeting in Denver was one such time. Jenna had gathered a cross-functional team to review the state of the business in the U.S. market. It was a typical business review with each function, in turn, presenting its “state of the business.” After several presentations, Daniel, the manager of the information technology team, began his presentation by showing the managers the data for how their field service staff was utilizing the IT tools that his team had built for them. He then inquired, “In light of these numbers, I wonder if the service teams are taking advantage of the tools that already exist?” Based on Jenna’s reaction, you would have thought he had just told her that her team was stupid and lazy. She snapped, “You have no idea what you are talking about,” and then berated him in front of the group. The argument got heated and lasted for an uncomfortable ten minutes. When somebody finally signaled that the group was overdue for a break, there was a rapid dash for the conference room door. But Daniel stayed in an attempt to hold his ground against Jenna. With every one out in the hall, the argument escalated irrationally and turned to shouting.

While things were heated in the conference room, outside in the hall there was a distinct chill in the air. Everyone in the hall was quietly cheering Daniel for standing up to the bully, but those who were next up to present were frozen with fear. You could feel the tension. The fortunate ones who had already given their presentations wished luck to their ill-fated colleagues. These remaining presenters began scrambling to adjust their presentations, taking out anything controversial that might incite the already livid leader. The presenters watered down their presentations, and they got through the meeting, but nothing much was really said and nothing much was accomplished.

Jenna’s organization made some modest progress but continually failed to hit its revenue and service quality targets. Eventually, when she went too far and bullied one of their partners, she was exited instantly from the organization. Jenna went to another company as

COO. She lasted two weeks before being demoted. Six months later she was asked to leave.

People hold back around leaders like Jenna. Such Tyrants shut down the flow of intelligence and rarely access people's best work. Everywhere they go, they find people doing less than they really can. It is no wonder they resort to intimidation, thinking it will get them what they no doubt want—great thinking and great work. But intimidation and fear rarely produce truly great work.

Let's look at another senior sales and services leader.

An Intense Leader

Robert Enslin is the president of SAP North America, the global software giant. Originally from South Africa, he speaks with a calm confidence. Robert is highly respected with a reputation as a fair, consistent sales leader who grows organizations and delivers results.

Robert operates as a peer to everyone he works with and is accessible to all. One of his managers said of him, "He is very good at disarming you. He is a commoner—one of us. Even if you work three levels below him, he still wants to know what you think." As a result, people are more transparent around him. They don't feel like they have to tell him what he wants to hear. This approachability creates safety for the people around Robert. And that safety is what allows him to run a massive sales organization with no surprises.

Several years ago, Robert was asked to take over the Japanese subsidiary for SAP to address some very specific sales performance issues. When he met with his new leadership team in Japan for the first forecast meeting, he could see the forecasting process was in complete disarray. Instead of playing the authoritarian, judging their failure and dictating his solution, Robert restrained himself and started a learning process. He helped them realize the limitations of the current process and the advantages of a new approach. He then drew on their knowledge of the Japanese business and asked them, "How can we take this to the next level?" He created space for the team to try new approaches and fix the problem themselves. He stayed with them on the issue for months until they could run a forecast process that delivered solid, predictable results for the business.

Robert was known for his collegial approach and his calm consistency, but this was tested when he took over the North American business in 2008, just as the global economy was melting down. As spending was locking up and large capital purchases were being put on hold, executives everywhere were beginning to panic. You could feel the tension as you walked through the halls of SAP's Newtown Square office near Philadelphia. One step past the glass door, you could feel the tension as you entered the executive conference room.

Inside another conference room, Robert and his new management team were assembled to plan their sales strategy in this new economic environment. Every person on his team knew that Robert had been meeting with the senior executives and was under a lot of pressure. They came to the meeting prepared to feel their share of the pain—after all, this was a sales organization. But Robert was calm and constant, even amid this chaos. His team began to wonder if he hadn't been reading the news or had skipped the executive meetings. He opened the meeting by acknowledging the severity of the economic issues, but suggested they put them aside. He kept the team focused on the issues within their control. He then asked, "What can we do to differentiate ourselves right now?" Safe within their sphere of expertise and control, the group worked to identify the value proposition that would help them position their solutions in the turbulent climate. After the discussion, he then asked, "How can we help people consume our products so they get the most economic value?" Again, the group could wrestle this question down and put together a plan.

His team said, "We know he must have been getting pressure from up higher, but he didn't create anxiety for us. He remained calm and just never wigged out. He doesn't create whiplash for his people."

Robert's calmness is not synonymous with softness. He is as intense and focused as any other successful sales executive. The difference is where his focus lies. A member of his leadership team said, "With Robert, it isn't about him. He makes it about you and about getting the best work from you."

Robert's steady hand and open environment provide sanity and stability to an organization that could have easily spun into crisis.

Tense Versus Intense

Tyrants create a *tense* environment—one that is full of stress and anxiety. Liberators like Robert create an *intense* environment that requires concentration, diligence, and energy. It is an environment where people are encouraged to think for themselves but also where people experience a deep obligation to do their best work.

Diminishers create a stress-filled environment because they don't give people control over their own performance. They operate as Tyrants, overexerting their will on the organization. They cause others to shrink, retreat, and hold back. In the presence of a Tyrant, people try not to stand out. Just consider how people operate under the rule of a political dictator. Tyrants get diminished thinking from others because people only offer the safest of ideas and mediocre work.

While a Tyrant creates stress that causes people to hold back, a Liberator creates space for people to step up. While a Tyrant swings between positions that create whiplash in the organization, a Liberator builds stability that generates forward momentum.

THE LIBERATOR

The Liberator creates an environment where good things happen. They create the conditions where intelligence is engaged, grown, and transformed into concrete successes. What are the conditions for this cycle of learning and success? They might include:

- Ideas are generated with ease.
- People learn rapidly and adapt to new environments.
- People work collaboratively.
- Complex problems get solved.
- Difficult tasks get accomplished.

Let's examine three Liberators from very different industries who created these conditions and freed their organizations to think and to perform.

Liberator #1: *Equity in the Firm*

Ernest Bachrach from Argentina is the managing partner and co-head of Latin America for Advent International, a global private equity firm. With twenty-seven years of experience in international private equity and an MBA from Harvard University, Ernest is clearly an expert. But the source of his genius is the environment he creates to unleash the genius of his organization.

One of his analysts described his approach: “Ernest makes a conscious effort to create an environment. He creates forums for people to voice their ideas. But he holds a very high bar for what you must do before you voice an opinion. You need to have the data. He has a problem with opinions without data.”

Ernest builds a learning machine in his organization. When he discovers performance problems, he is quick to give feedback. The feedback is direct and sometimes harsh, but he dispenses the feedback in small enough doses that someone can absorb it, learn from it and adjust. He teaches his organization that mistakes are a way of life in the investment business. And how does he respond to mistakes? First, he doesn’t panic or assign arbitrary blame. One team member said, “He lets us know that when decisions are collective, the mistakes are collective, too. No one person takes the blame.” The team then does a postmortem and learns how to avoid the error a second time.

It appears that Ernest understands how to create an environment that best leverages the investments he has made in his people. This might be one factor in his recent promotion to chief executive of Advent in Latin America.

Liberator #2: *Close Encounters*

Everyone knows Steven Spielberg as an award-winning film director. It is likely that your top-ten movie list includes one of his films. But why are his movies so successful, grossing an average of $156 million per film? Some would posit that it is his creative genius and his ability to tell a story. Others would point to his work ethic. But the active agent may be his ability to elicit more from his crew than other directors do. People who have worked on Spielberg’s films say, “You do your best work around him.”

One way he elicits the best thinking from people is that he knows what people are actually capable of producing. He knows everyone’s job intimately, but he doesn’t do it for them. He tells them that he has hired them because he admires their work. He uses his knowledge of the job and of their personal capabilities to set a standard for demanding their best work.

He comes with strong ideas of his own, but he makes it clear that bad ideas are an okay starting point. He says, “All good ideas start as bad ideas. That’s why it takes so long.” He establishes an open, creative environment, but he still demands extraordinary work from his team. One of his crew members said, “He expects people to be doing their best. And you know it when you aren’t giving your best.”

And why does Spielberg produce so many successful movies? Because his crew is twice as productive as those of some of the Tyrant directors we studied. Because Spielberg creates an environment where people can do their best work, these artists and staff sign up to work with him again and again. In fact, Spielberg typically manages two projects simultaneously, each in different production stages, because his crew stays with him and rolls directly onto the next project. He gets their best work and 2X the productivity! And they get to create award-winning films along with him.

Liberator #3: *A Master Teacher*

Stop and think about the best teachers you’ve had. Pause for a moment and identify one or two in your mind. What type of learning environment did they create? How much space and freedom of thought did you have? What were the expectations of your performance? In what ways were you stretched and utilized? And how did you actually perform? I asked these questions of a dozen eighth-grade students in Mr. Kelly’s class.

Patrick Kelly is an eighth-grade U.S. history and social studies teacher at a distinguished California public school. He caught my attention when I learned that every year at middle school graduation ceremony, he not only gets more “shout-outs and thank-yous” from the graduating students than any other teacher, he gets more than all the other teachers combined. He is more talked about, more loathed, more beloved than any other teacher at the school. Why?

I got my first glimpse at the fall parent information night at La Entrada Middle School. It is one of those nights parents with multiple children dread because, with four children, I have to get to seventeen different teachers’ classes, many simultaneously, defying laws of physics. My daughter in eighth grade said to me, “Here’s my class schedule. Get to as many classes as you can, but be sure to make it to Mr. Kelly’s social studies class. And do *not* be late. And do not talk during his presentation. And do not answer your cell phone. And do *not* be late. Mom, did you hear me about not being late?" I entered his classroom both scared and intrigued. After the standard twelve-minute segment with Mr. Kelly, I left enchanted with eighth-grade social studies, ready to quit my job and go back to middle school to learn U.S. history.

Why does he affect students and parents alike in such powerful ways?

It begins with his classroom environment. He makes it clear that you are there to work hard, to think, and to learn. One student said, "In his class, he doesn't tolerate laziness. You're always working, thinking things over, and seeing your mistakes so you can learn from them." It's a professional and serious environment, which gets lighter and more fun as the students work harder. In this environment, students are encouraged to speak up and voice their opinions. Equal weight is given to asking a good question as answering one of his.

Mr. Kelly's expectations for the students' learning are both clear and extremely high. One student said, "He believes that with high expectations come high results. He demands our best. He makes it clear that if we put in our hardest effort, we will succeed." Another said, "He doesn't hide anything from us and lets us know what to improve on. He demands that we work to the best of our ability." No more, no less—just to the best of their ability. There is no homework in his class—nothing assigned, nothing arbitrary. Instead, students are encouraged to do "independent study" to help them understand the ideas and perform well on tests. The students, having made the choice themselves, do the independent study with zeal.

Not all students like Mr. Kelly. Some find him too tough, too demanding, and his expectations unfair compared to other teachers'. For students wanting the easy path, his class can be an uncomfortable environment. But most students are engaged by his intelligence and his dedication and thrive under his leadership. They experience his contagious passion and themselves become passionate about civil rights, the U.S. Constitution, and their role in the political process.

Patrick Kelly is a Multiplier who liberates his students to think and learn. He creates an environment where students can speak out but where they are required to think and perform at their finest. It won't surprise you that 98 percent of students in his class score at the “proficient” or “advanced” levels on standardized state tests, up from 82 percent just three years ago.[2]

A Hybrid Climate

The secret behind the environment in Mr. Kelly’s classroom (and Ernest Bachrach’s firm and Steven Spielberg’s movie sets) is in a duality we consistently found with Liberators. They appear to hold two ostensibly opposing positions with equal fervor. They create both comfort *and* pressure in the environment. In the eyes of the Liberator, it is a just exchange: I give you space; you give me back your best work.

Liberators also give people space to make mistakes. They create an environment of learning, but they expect people to learn from the mistakes. It is another fair trade: I give you permission to make mistakes; you have an obligation to learn from the mistakes and not repeat them.

The power of Liberators emanates from this duality. It isn’t enough to just free people’s thinking. They create an intense environment that requires people’s best thinking *and* their best work. They generate pressure, but they don’t generate stress.

Liberators operate with a duality much like that of a hybrid car that switches over seamlessly between the electric and the gasoline engine. At low speeds, a hybrid operates in electric mode. At high speeds, it draws on the gasoline to fuel the extra demands on the engine. Such leaders create an open, comfortable environment where people can freely think and contribute. But when more power is needed, they invoke their demanding side that commands only the best performance from others.

How do Liberators create a safe, open environment, but also relentlessly demand the best thinking and work of those around them? How do they get the full brainpower of the organization? Let’s turn to the practices of the Liberator for answers.

THE THREE PRACTICES OF THE LIBERATOR

Among the Multipliers we studied in our research, we found three common practices. Liberators: 1) create space; 2) demand people’s best work; and 3) generate rapid learning cycles. We'll examine each in turn.

I. Create Space

Everyone needs space. We need space to contribute and to work. Liberators don't take it for granted that people have the space they need. They deliberately carve out space for others to be able to make a contribution. They do so in the following ways.

Release Others by Restraining Yourself

It is a small victory to create space for others to contribute. But it is a huge victory to maintain that space and resist the temptation to jump back in and consume it yourself. This is especially true in formal, hierarchical organizations where people are accustomed to deferring to their leaders.

Ray Lane, former president of Oracle Corporation and current managing partner at Kleiner Perkins venture capital, is a master at executive restraint. One of his portfolio CEOs remarked, "Ray has learned the importance of restraint in leadership. He knows that less is more, and he never wastes an opinion."

When Ray goes on sales calls to meet with executives at a potential client's, two things are certain: 1) The client will want to hear from Ray and his vast experience and 2) Ray will be prepared. But despite these forces pulling him in, he holds back. He makes a few opening pleasantries, but he lets the sales team do the deal. Issues come up in conversation that Ray has a point of view about, but still he waits. The sales team, knowing full well that Ray could probably be doing a better job than they, continues their work nonetheless. When they are done, Ray then comes into the conversation. He still doesn't unleash his ideas and give a monologue. He has listened carefully and knows exactly what he wants to add. He dispenses his views in small but intense doses.

A longtime colleague of Ray remarked, "He'll often be quiet for long stretches of an important meeting. He listens to what others are saying. And when he does speak, everyone listens."

Ray is well known as a brilliant strategist and perhaps one of the most articulate communicators in his business. But instead of overplaying himself and his own ideas, he creates room for others and uses his presence where it can have the greatest potency and impact for the team.

Shift the Ratio of Listening to Talking

Liberators are more than just good listeners. They are ferocious listeners. They listen to feed their hunger for knowledge. They listen to learn what other people know and add it to their own reservoir of knowledge. As management guru C.K. Prahalad said to me, "How smart you are is defined by how clearly you can see the intellect of others." They listen intently because they are trying to learn and understand what other people know.

John Brandon, one of Apple Inc.'s top sales executives, runs an organization that brings in over $12 billion in revenue each year across three regions of the world. John is a high-energy sales leader and maintains an aggressive travel and meeting schedule, so getting time on his calendar can be tough. But when his direct reports meet with him one-on-one, they get his whole presence. John listens intently to them and is keenly interested in understanding their reality—what is really happening on the ground, with customers and with deals. He asks probing questions that get to the heart of the matter. One of his direct reports said, "The difference with John is not that he listens; it is that he listens to an extreme." In a typical conversation, he spends 80 percent of the time listening and asking questions. By listening, asking, and probing, John develops an understanding of the realities of the business and an understanding with his team of the opportunities and problems they face. This collective insight into the market has enabled John's organization to experience a phenomenal 375 percent growth over the last five years. John, who can certainly talk a good game himself, knows when it is time to listen.

Liberators don't just listen the majority of time. They massively shift the ratio, listening most of the time. This creates space for others to share what they know.

Operate Consistently

Imagine a troop of young girls competing in double-dutch jump rope. Visualize the smooth, even rhythm of the turning ropes. The turners stand at the ropes' ends and rapidly turn the two ropes in opposite directions. Their role is clear and vital—maintain both a consistent arc and a constant speed. Their consistency is what makes it safe for the jumpers to enter the whirling space. Any erratic turns or inconsistency and a jumper can't enter or trips doing so. Consistency creates predictability. When leaders are consistent, it lets others know when they can jump in and allows them to contribute.

Operating with consistency is one of the most vital of the practices of the Liberator. In our interviews, we continually heard how Multipliers operate with a consistency that enables others. For example, John Brandon was described as "comfortable, consistent, confident, relaxed, and disarming." Craig Conway, former CEO of PeopleSoft, "took emotion out of every situation. He put a consistently professional front to everything."

The consistency of their actions creates two effects: 1) It establishes a predictable pattern of behavior. This allows others to know when it is their turn and where there is space for them to contribute. 2) It creates safety. When people operate in predictable ways, we know what to expect and we become comfortable around them. This comfort allows people not only to jump in, but to do so with full power of thought.

Recall how Robert Enslin's consistent leadership created a calming effect on his organization. He was able to contain stress instead of flowing it out to the organization. This consistency gave people the platform for transparency and the ability to focus on the real issues—delivering value to SAP customers, which, in turn, delivered revenue to the corporation.

Level the Playing Field

In any formal organization, the playing field is rarely level, and certain voices are inherently advantaged. These include senior executives, influential thought leaders, critical organizations like product development or sales, and people with deep legacy knowledge. Unless managed, other voices that are perhaps closest to the real issues can become muffled. Liberators amplify these voices to extract maximum intelligence and give advantage to the ideas and voices on the lower end of the playing field.

When Nick Reilly—the first president and CEO of GM Daewoo Auto and Technology (GMDAT)—took the reins, he brought together the American automaker and a very traditional Korean company. He also took explicit steps to level the playing field. Reilly created a senior leadership team consisting of four Koreans, three Europeans, and four Americans. Reilly, a native of the U.K., knew the GM team was likely to dominate. Yet it was clear to him that the success of the operation depended on the team's ability to draw on the talent and intellectual assets of the former Daewoo members.

Reilly served as an amplifier, establishing systems for drawing out the contributions of the Korean team members, who were all in their midfifties and initially spoke limited English. He made sure that all executive meetings were simultaneously translated into Korean. At every turn, he showed respect for the Korean team and the legacy Daewoo had built. He asked the Korean team members what aspects of Daewoo's culture needed to be preserved, and consequently protected them. He created learning teams by pairing Koreans and non-Koreans to work together and learn from each other. Out of these two cultures, he created a third joint culture based on a set of common values and a level playing field. The team created a new mission, vision, and values for the organization and began to embed them in the Korean operations.

Under Reilly's leadership, functional silos were reduced and a company that had been on the brink of liquidation became a major revenue source for General Motors. It also became a hub for global small car design and development, with complete vehicles and kits for assembly at other GM facilities being sold in more than 150 countries worldwide (a 3,000 percent volume increase in one year alone!). One senior executive stated, "The way Nick led this joint venture created a higher level of aspiration for all of us."

GMDAT is not exempt from the challenges of today's business world and has recently posted a loss, but in October 2009, GM increased its ownership stake in GMDAT to 70.1 percent—a strong statement of its belief in its Korean unit. Reilly now heads GM International Operations and, in October 2009, was named an honorary citizen of Seoul.

Liberators begin by creating space, but they do more than create space for others to contribute. Yes, they do provide the space, but they also expect extraordinary work in return.

II. Demand People's Best Work

Henry Kissinger, Secretary of State under Richard Nixon, was a master at getting people's best work. According to one story, his chief of staff once handed in a report he had written on an aspect of foreign policy. When Kissinger received the report, he asked simply, "Is this your best work?" The chief thought for a moment and, worried that his boss would think the report was not good enough, responded, "Mr. Kissinger, I think I can do better." So Kissinger gave the report back. Two weeks later the chief turned in the revised report. Kissinger kept it for a week and then sent it back with a note that said, "Are you sure this is your best work?" Realizing that something must have been missing, the chief once again rewrote the report. This time when he handed the report to his boss he said, "Mr. Kissinger, this is my best work." Upon hearing this, Kissinger replied, "Then this time I will read your report."[3]

Here are a few ways that Liberators demand the best from those they work with.

Defend the Standard

Larry Gelwix, the head coach of Highland Rugby, stood at the center of a huddle of rugby players at the side of the field for the team's first game debrief of the season. Larry asked one question, "Did you give your *best*?"

One player enthusiastically spoke up, "Well we won, didn't we?" Not unkindly, Larry said, "That's not the question I asked." Another player jumped in. "We just dominated that team. We won 64 to 20. What more could you ask for?" Larry said, "When you came for tryouts, I said I expected your *best*. That means your best thinking out there as well as your best physical effort. Is that what you gave today?"

One player described one game played on the island of Tonga when he could answer "yes" to Larry's question. He said, "I had a painful shoulder contusion after a devastating tackle on my opponent. I was ready to quit, ready to let my team down. I couldn't lift my arm and the pain was excruciating. I remember I began to chant the *haka* [a traditional Maori war chant] in my head. I remember looking over at the sunset through the palm trees. At that very moment the game seemed to stop, and I had a choice. A voice told me that I needed to keep going and do my best, not only for myself, but for who I am, and most importantly for the team—for my brothers. The voice was the recollection of countless practices and games when Coach Gelwix simply asked, ‘Is that your best?’ I finished that game with two tries [each the equivalent of a touchdown] becoming the first high school American to score in Tonga.”

As a manager you know when someone is below his or her usual performance. What is harder to know is whether people are giving everything they have to give. Asking whether people are giving their best gives them the opportunity to push themselves beyond their previous limits. It is a key reason why people report that Multipliers get more than 100 percent intelligence out of them.

Distinguish Best Work from Outcomes

Requiring people’s best work is different from insisting on desired outcomes. Stress is created when people are expected to produce outcomes that are beyond their control. But they feel positive pressure when they are held to their best work.

K.R. Sridhar, CEO of Bloom Energy, innovator of green-power generators globally, and a renowned scientist himself, has mastered this distinction in his company. He said, “If you want your organization to take risks, you have to separate the experiment from the outcome. I have zero tolerance if someone does not run the experiment. But I don’t hold them accountable for the outcome of the experiment. I only hold them accountable to execute.” This is one of Bloom Energy’s secrets for innovating across complex, integrated technologies.

K.R. understands the distinction between pressure and stress. He cites the famous image of William Tell shooting an apple off his son’s head: “In this scenario, William Tell feels pressure. His son feels stress.” K.R. keeps the pressure on his team to act, but doesn’t create stress by holding them accountable for outcomes beyond their control.

III. Generate Rapid Learning Cycles

In studying Multipliers, I have often wondered, *How smart do you have to be to be a Multiplier?* The answer from Bill Campbell, chairman and former CEO of Intuit was perfect: “You have to be smart enough to learn.”

Perhaps most important, Liberators give people permission to make mistakes and the obligation to learn from them.

Admit and Share Mistakes

When Lutz Ziob took over as general manager of the education business at Microsoft in 2003, it was falling short of its goals for revenue and reach. Lutz needed to make progress fast and could have easily created a stressful environment around him. But he also needed the organization to be creative and take risks if they were to catch up in the market. It was a classic management dilemma. If you take the obvious path, the climate will become tense and your people may become risk averse. However, if you lessen the pressure by softening the goals, then your organization becomes complacent. Lutz did neither.

Instead, he created an environment that was equal parts pressure and learning. Lutz never backed down from the natural pressure for the business to perform, but he made it safe for people to take risks and make mistakes. He did this by how he responded to both his mistakes and the mistakes of others.

Lutz was shameless in speaking about his own mistakes. He loves to tell stories, and his favorites are about his mistakes. Instead of hiding his own mistakes or diffusing them onto his staff, he confesses them. When he launched an unsuccessful product, he talked about it openly and what he learned from it. One member of his management team said, “He brings an intellectual curiosity for why things didn’t work out.” By taking his mistakes public, he made it safe for others to take risks and fail.

Insist on Learning from Mistakes

Lutz creates room for other people to make mistakes. When Chris Pirie, the general manager for sales and marketing working for Lutz, was newly promoted to lead sales for Microsoft Learning, he tried a risky promotion. Unfortunately it didn’t work. But instead of rationalizing the mistake, he went to Lutz and admitted the misstep, diagnosed it, and then tried something different. Chris said, “With Lutz, you get to make mistakes. But you are expected to learn fast. With Lutz, it’s okay to fail. You just can’t make the same mistake twice.”

Lutz loves feedback. He isn’t just open to it. He insists on it. A direct report of his recalled a time he had to give Lutz some tough-love feedback. Lutz was involved in a critical project and was particularly excited about the possibilities for the business. As such, he had been dominating the discussion and had taken over. Lutz's direct report scheduled a one-on-one. He sat down in Lutz's office and delivered the feedback: "Lutz, you are sucking the oxygen out of the room. No one else has any room to breathe. You need to back off." How do you think Lutz responded? How would you have responded if one of your people suggested you were a domineering oxygen hog? Lutz's curiosity was triggered, and his response was simple. He asked, "What does it look like? Who did it impact? How do I avoid doing it again?" After taking the time to understand his mistake, he asked his direct report, "Will you tell me if I do this again?" His final comment to his direct report was, "I wish you would have told me sooner." He really meant it.

Lutz achieved the climate he wanted even amidst a stressful external environment by generating rapid learning cycles. As Chris Pirie said, "Lutz creates an environment where good things happen." Even in times of immense external pressure, Lutz created a climate that drew out people's best thinking and work. He maintained a creative intensity.

Tyrants and Liberators both expect mistakes. Tyrants stand ready to pounce on the people who make them. Liberators stand ready to learn as much from the mistake as possible. The highest quality of thinking cannot emerge without learning. Learning can't happen without mistakes. Liberators get the best thinking from people by creating a rapid cycle between thinking, learning, and making and recovering from mistakes. They move rapidly through this cycle in order to generate the best ideas and create an agile organization. As K.R. Sridhar explained, "We iterate fast so we can bring cycle time down. The key to this rapid iteration is creating an environment where people can bring up risks and deal with mistakes sooner." A.G. Lafley, former CEO at Procter & Gamble said, "You want your people to fail early, fast, and cheap—and then learn from it."

Diminishers don't generate these cycles. They might request—if not demand—people's best thinking, but they fail to establish the environment where ideas are easily expressed and developed to full maturity and efficacy.

THE DIMINISHER'S APPROACH TO ENVIRONMENT

Diminishers haven't developed this smooth duality of comfort and pressure. Instead, they jerk the organization around as they swing between two modes: 1) militant insistence on their ideas and 2) passive indifference to the ideas and work of others.

Timothy Wilson is an award-winning Hollywood property master. He and his team set the scene and create context for a movie, and he has worked on some of the biggest and most successful films. He's a creative genius, but he comes at a high cost. Why? Because so few people are willing to work with him *twice*.

One of his staff said, "I'd take any job before working with him." Signing up to work with Timothy means working in fear and stress with little enjoyment. Those who do work for him say, "You don't want to come back to work the next day." From the moment Timothy steps onto the set, the mood changes. People brace for his criticism. As Jeremy sees Timothy walk over to one of the props that he had been working on for the last two days, Jeremy wonders which of the usual insults it will be. Or will he perhaps deliver a rare compliment? Timothy inspects the prop, and delivers his signature critique, loudly and to the whole group, "This looks like a prop for a B movie." And then there are the random things that set him off. If the prop cart isn't organized correctly, he goes crazy. One day he got so tense that he argued with the director of photography and threw his walkie-talkie at him. The set went from tense to tenser as people prepared to duck and cover.

Some leaders create an *intense* environment that requires people's best thinking and work. Timothy created a *tense* environment by dominating the space, creating anxiety, and judging others in a way that had a stifling effect on people's thinking and output.

DOMINATE THE SPACE. Tyrants are like a gas that expands and consumes all the available space. They dominate meetings and hog all the air time. They leave little room for anyone else and often suffocate other people's intelligence in the process. They do this by voicing strong opinions, overexpressing their ideas and trying to maintain control. Garth Yamamoto, chief marketing officer at a consumer products company, uses up almost every cubic inch of space in the room. He jumps in and interrupts people's presentations, he expresses very strong and extreme opinions, and either spends his time micromanaging or is noticeably absent. People warn newcomers in his division, "The art of being successful around here is figuring out Garth." One member of his group said, "I think I am atrophying here. I'm probably giving him about 50 percent." That person has since left the organization and is thriving in another company.

CREATE ANXIETY. The hallmark of a Tyrant is their temperamental and unpredictable behavior. People don't know what will set them off, but it is almost certain that the mood will change when they are around. It is as if Tyrants impose an "anxiety tax" wherever they go. A percentage of people's mental energy is consumed trying to avoid upsetting the Tyrant. Just think of the wasted productivity on the set with Timothy Wilson. Instead of using their full energy making "A movie" props, Timothy's team worries about the next thing that Timothy is going to say or do or, for that matter, throw.

JUDGE OTHERS. Tyrants centralize their power and play judge, jury, and executioner. In sharp contrast to the rapid learning cycles of the Liberator, Tyrants create cycles of criticism, judgment, and retreat. Like the presenters scurrying to adjust their presentations for Jenna Healy (the telecommunications sales leader who resembled Miranda Priestly in *The Devil Wears Prada*), people retreat to a safe position where their ideas won't be criticized or exposed. The Japanese have a saying for this: *Deru kui wa utareru*, which translated means, "The stake that sticks out gets hammered down."

When leaders play the role of the Tyrant, they suppress people's thinking and capability. People restrain themselves and work cautiously, only bringing up safe ideas that the leader is likely to agree with. This is why Diminishers are costly to organizations. Under the influence of a Diminisher, the organization pays full price for a resource but only receives about 50 percent of its value.

FROM LIBERATION TO RESOURCE LEVERAGE

Why do Liberators get the full value from their resources?

Multipliers know that people are intelligent and will figure it out. Because they engage people's natural intelligence, people offer them back their full brainpower. Because people have a foundation of safety and comfort, they are free to offer their boldest ideas, not just the safe ideas that will keep them out of the wrath of a Tyrant. The environment of learning has enabled them to take risks, and quickly and inexpensively recover from them.

There is an assumption that underlies the practices of a Liberator. It is that *people's best thinking must be given*, *not taken*. A manager may be able to insist on certain levels of productivity and output, but someone's full effort, including their truly discretionary effort, must be given voluntarily. This changes the leader's role profoundly. Instead of demanding the best work directly, they create an environment where it not only can be offered, but where it is deeply needed. Because the environment naturally requires it, a person freely bestows their best thinking and work.

Multipliers not only get full brainpower from their team, they grow capability rapidly. Our research shows that they don't just get twice more, they get twice the capability with an extra 5 to 10 percent growth bonus.

Diminishers, on the other hand, believe that *pressure increases performance*. They demand people's best thinking, but they don't get it. They fail to establish the environment where ideas are easily expressed and developed to full maturity and efficacy. An unsafe environment yields only the safest ideas.

The following chart reflects why Tyrants leave capability on the table while Liberators extract full intelligence and capability from the people around them.

Tyrants

***What They Do*:**

Create a tense environment that suppresses people's thinking and capability

***What They Get*:**

People who hold back but appear to be engaged on the surface

Safe ideas the leader already agrees with

People who work cautiously, avoid taking risks, and find excuses for any mistakes they make

Liberators

***What They Do*:**

Create an intense environment that requires people's best thinking and work

***What They Get*:**

People who offer their best thinking and really engage their full brainpower

The best and boldest ideas

People who give their full effort and will go out on a limb and learn quickly from any mistakes

The promise of a Multiplier is twice the capacity. Let's now look at a few of the starting points for how someone becomes a Liberator to their organization.

BECOMING A LIBERATOR

Remember that the path of least resistance is often the path of the Diminisher. As Michael said, "It's not like it isn't tempting to be tyrannical when you can." Becoming a Liberator requires long-term commitment. Here are a few starting points.

The Starting Block

1. PLAY YOUR CHIPS. If you want to create more room for others to contribute, and especially if you are prone to dominating a discussion, you might consider a good game of poker chips.

Matthew is a smart, articulate leader. However, he often found himself frustrated and out ahead of his organization, struggling to bring a cross-functional team along with him and his ideas. He was also struggling to be heard. He had great ideas, but he was simply talking too much and taking up too much space in team meetings. I was working with him to prepare a critical leadership forum for his division. He was eagerly awaiting the opportunity to share his views about the strategy for advancing the business to the next level. Instead of encouraging him, I gave him a challenge.

I gave him five poker chips, each worth a number of seconds of talk time. One was worth 120 seconds, the next three worth 90 seconds, and one was worth just 30. I suggested he limit his contribution in the meeting to five comments, represented by each of the chips. He could spend them whenever he wished, but he only had five. After the initial shock and bemusement (wondering how he could possibly convey all his ideas in five comments), he accepted the challenge. I watched as he carefully restrained himself, filtering his thoughts for only the most essential and looking for the right moment to insert his ideas. He played his poker chips deftly and achieved two important outcomes: 1) he created abundant space for others. Instead of it being Matthew's strategy session, it became a forum for a diverse group to voice ideas and co-create the strategy, and 2) Matthew increased his own credibility and presence as a leader. By exercising some leadership restraint, everyone was heard more, including Matthew as the leader.

Try giving yourself a budget of poker chips for a meeting. Maybe it is five; maybe it is just one or two. Use them wisely, and leave the rest of the space for others to contribute.

2. LABEL YOUR OPINIONS. As you know, formal organizations can create a strong deference to the opinions and thinking of the leader. One executive described his first week as the newly appointed president of a large company. People came at him from all directions to ask him their pent-up questions. He was new and wanted to be helpful, so he would offer a casual opinion. To his amazement, weeks later he found that his opinions had become a set of disjointed policies. As he unraveled the mess, he learned to carefully label the difference between a random musing, an opinion, and a policy decision.

Try the practice used by Michael Chang, in his shift to Liberator. Divide your views into "soft opinions" and "hard opinions":

- *Soft opinions:* where you have a perspective to offer and ideas for someone else to consider
- *Hard opinions:* where you have a clear and potentially emphatic point of view

By doing so, you can create space for others to comfortably disagree with your "soft opinion" thinking and establish their own views. Reserve the right to have "hard opinions" for when it really matters.

3. MAKE YOUR MISTAKES KNOWN. There is no easier way to invite experimentation and learning than to share stories about your own mistakes. As a leader, your acknowledgment of your personal mistakes will give others permission to experience failure and go on to learn and recover with dignity and increased capability.

Great parents do this with their children. They understand that their children are liberated when they know their parents are human and make mistakes just as they do. They especially appreciate knowing that their parents learned from their blunders and recovered. When we help people see a path to recovery, we spawn a learning cycle.

As you share your mistakes, try these two approaches:

1. *Get personal:* Let people know mistakes you have made and what you have learned from them. Let them know how you have incorporated this learning into your decisions and current leadership practices. As a manager of a consulting group, you might share with your team the time you led a project that failed and how you dealt with the livid customer. You can focus on what the experience taught you and how it shaped your current approach to project management.

2. *Go public:* Instead of talking about mistakes behind closed doors or just one-on-one, bring them out in the open where the person making a mistake can clear the air and where everyone can learn. Try making it part of your management ritual.

As a corporate manager, I would often take this practice to the extreme. A regular feature in my staff meetings was "screwup of the week." If any member of my management team, including myself, had an embarrassing blunder, this was the time to go public, have a good laugh, and move on. This simple gesture sent a message to the team: Mistakes are an essential part of progress.

Each of the above is a simple starting point. But if done consistently over time, these practices can allow a leader to become a powerful force for liberating the intelligence from within an organization.

A LIBERATING FORCE

On January 1, 1831, William Lloyd Garrison, an antislavery activist, began a paper called *The Liberator*, of which he published 1,820 issues over thirty-five years. In *The Liberator*, Garrison spoke out eloquently and passionately against slavery and for the rights of America's black inhabitants. He wrote in the first edition: "I do not wish to think, or speak, or write, with moderation…I am in earnest—I will not equivocate—I will not excuse—I will not retreat a single inch—and I will be heard."

Garrison's fervor captures the essence of Multipliers. They aren't necessarily social activists like Garrison, but they do activate intelligence. They aren't Tyrants, but they can be a bit despotic in their liberation. Multipliers liberate people from the intimidation of hierarchical organizations and the domination of tyrannical leaders. They see intelligence around them, and they release it into the organization so it can be freely utilized at its highest point of contribution. They create an environment where ideas can be heard and where intelligence can be given, grown, and stretched through challenge.

THE MULTIPLIER FORMULA

THE TYRANT VERSUS THE LIBERATOR

TYRANTS create a tense environment that suppresses people's thinking and capability. As a result, people hold back, bring up safe ideas that the leader agrees with, and work cautiously.

LIBERATORS create an intense environment that requires people's best thinking and work. As a result, people offer their best and boldest thinking and give their best effort.

The Three Practices of the Liberator

1. *Create Space*

- Release others by restraining yourself
- Shift the ratio of listening to talking
- Operate consistently
- Level the playing field

2. *Demand Best Work*

- Defend the standard
- Distinguish best work from outcomes

3. *Generate Rapid Learn*ing Cycles

- Admit and share mistakes
- Insist on learning from mistakes

Becoming a Liberator

1. Play your chips

2. Label your opinions

3. Make your mistakes known

Unexpected Findings

1. The path of least resistance is often the path of tyranny. Because many organizations are skewed, a leader can be above average in an organization and still operate as a Tyrant.

2. Liberators maintain a duality of giving people permission to think while also creating an obligation for them to do their best work.

3. Multipliers are intense. Leaders who can discern and create the difference between a tense and an intense climate can access significantly more brainpower from their organizations.