

Multipliers

by Liz Wiseman

How the best leaders make everyone smarter

Book Summary

Multipliers is based on the premise that any leader can be placed on a spectrum between two categories—Multiplier and Diminisher—and investigates the behavioural traits of these two types.

In pondering the definitions, you may be drawn to think of particular leaders you've encountered yourself..

Multipliers amplify or multiply the intelligence of the people around them. They lead organisations or teams that are able to understand and solve hard problems rapidly, achieve their goals, and adapt and increase their capacity over time.

Diminishers drain the intelligence, energy and capability from the ones around them. They lead organisations or teams that operate in silos, find it hard to get things done, and—despite having smart people—seem unable to do what's needed to reach their goals.

Teams working for Diminishers:

- often find themselves in a never-ending spin cycle through changing ideas/requirements, requiring constant “Hail Mary” efforts.
- work hard, but move slowly.
- are overworked, yet under-utilised.

Diminishers:

- believe intelligence is scarce, and fixed: people who don't “get it” today never will.
- attempt to increase output using the logic of addition—by adding additional headcount.
- use, blame, tell, decide, control.

In contrast, Multipliers:

- view intelligence as continually developing, and that an individual's intelligence can grow if stretched. They assume everyone is smart, and will figure things out.
- observe people to be under-utilised when their current work doesn't make use of their full abilities—even if working flat-out.
- grow output using the logic of multiplication—by better utilising their existing team.
- develop, explore, challenge, consult, support.

Multipliers are hard-edged managers. They expect great work and drive people to achieve extraordinary results.

Multipliers don't seek to do more with less, they look to more with more—using more of the under-utilised intelligence and capability in their teams without necessarily requiring additional headcount.

Wiseman identified Multipliers get on average 2x from their people. They're genius makers—people actually get smarter around them.

The 5 Disciplines of a Multiplier

While Multipliers do many of the same things as Diminishers, the book takes us through the 5 things Multipliers do very differently:

1. Attract and optimise talent. (They're a Talent Magnet, rather than an Empire Builder)
2. Create intensity that requires the best thinking. (Liberator vs. Tyrant)
3. Extend challenges and ensure direction gets set, rather than set direction themselves. (Challenger vs. Know-it-all)
4. Debate decisions and issues up front, and ensure they don't leave their organisation in the dark. (Debate Maker vs. Decision Maker)
5. Delegate ownership and accountability. (Investor vs. Micromanager)

1. The Talent Magnet vs. the Empire Builder

Men wanted, for hazardous journey, small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful. Honour and recognition in case of success.

- Ernest Shackleton's British Antarctic Expedition recruitment ad in The Times.

Multipliers are often viewed as the best boss to work for. Everyone grows around them; "A players become A+". They consider the role of the person at the top a genius maker rather than themselves a genius. As a result they attract the best talent through word of mouth.

Diminishers look to build teams of the best talent, but only to make themselves look good. Once within their team, talent is stunted.

The 4 practices of a Talent Magnet

1. Look for talent everywhere. They appreciate all types of genius, and ignore traditional organisation boundaries when looking for people who can contribute.
2. Find people's native genius. They look for what people's innate strengths are, call them out, and label them. "In what way is this person smart?"
3. Utilise people at their fullest, connect people with opportunities, and shine a spotlight on them.
4. Remove blockers. Get rid of prima donnas, and get out of the way themselves. "Ignore me as needed to get the job done."

Talent Magnets ignore org charts. They believe they can get anyone in an organisation to work for them if they can uncover the person's genius.

Finding native genius

Talent Magnets look for people that are smart in ways that can't be measured through an IQ test:

- quantitative analysis
- verbal reasoning
- creative genius
- critical—ability to identify problems
- finding a way through problems
- strong learning orientation

Contrast with classic “intelligence”—the IQ test was originally developed by Alfred Binet on the assumption that lower intelligence signalled a need for more and different teaching, not the inability to learn.

What do people do exceptionally well, easily, and freely without condition? For these things they don’t necessarily need to be paid or rewarded, or often even asked.

- What do they do better than anything else they do?
- What do they do better than the people around them?
- What do they do without effort?
- What do they do without being asked?
- What do they do readily without being paid?

People may not be aware of their own genius. “Fish discover water last”. Highlighting someone’s genius can help them develop further.

Becoming a Talent Magnet

- Become a Genius Watcher
 1. Identify it. Consider 7–8 people you work with, and repeatedly ask yourself “why are they great at what they do?” until you uncover their raw abilities.
 2. Test it. Ask them and others what they think.
 3. Work it. Make a list of 5 different roles that would utilise and expand each person’s genius (these could be formal roles or ad-hoc projects).
- Pull Some Weeds
Leaders most often know who the blockers are—the most common mistake is waiting too long to remove them. Don’t remove people quietly—huddle the team immediately afterwards and give people permission to think clearly again.

Although they removing blockers, Multipliers are not overprotective of their team such that they no longer have room to tackle their own problems and grow. “Nothing grows under a banyan tree”.

2. The Liberator vs. the Tyrant

Multipliers know people’s best thinking and work must be given, not taken. They liberate their team and create a safe environment for them to perform at their best, rather than operating a tyrannical rule that demotivates and closes people down.

Multipliers view the leader’s job as to put other people on stage, rather than take the stage themselves.

The 3 practices of a Liberator

1. Create space
 - Release others by restraining yourself. Distinguish when you give hard opinions, versus soft opinions that are just ideas for people to consider in their own thinking.
 - Shift the ratio of listening to talking. Multipliers are not just good listeners—they’re ferocious. Multipliers listen most of the time.
 - Operate consistently. Of manner, behaviour. This enables others to know when it’s their turn, and creates safety.
 - Level the playing field. Multipliers amplify quieter voices to ensure balance.
2. Demand best work
 - Defend the standard. Know when someone is below their usual performance, and stretch them to grow. “Is this your best work?”
 - Distinguish best work from outcomes. Being held to particular outcomes produces stress. Multipliers

expect high standards—they have zero tolerance for not running an experiment. But they hold their team accountable for execution, not results.

3. Generate rapid learning cycles
 - Admit and share their own mistakes. This gives others permission to make and recover from their own.
 - Insist on learning from mistakes.

Becoming a Liberator

1. Play your poker chips. Limit how many times you can speak in a meeting, forcing you to choose your moments.
2. Label your opinions. Distinguish clearly between random musings, opinion, and policy decision. Call out soft vs. hard opinions.
3. Make your mistakes known.

Multipliers still place great demands on their teams, pushing them to achieve their best. But they do so in a way that creates safety and opens people up.

Multipliers are still hard-edged leaders—they're typically not soft feel-good types. They create an environment that's intense rather than tense.

3. The Challenger vs. the Know-it-all

The number 1 difference between a Nobel prize winner and others is not IQ or work ethic, but that they ask bigger questions.—Peter Drucker

Know-it-alls give directives that showcase how much they know. As a result they limit what their organisation can achieve to what they themselves know how to do. The organisation uses its energy to deduce what the boss thinks.

Challengers define opportunities that challenge people to go beyond what they know how to do. As a result they get an organisation that understands the challenge and has the focus and energy to take it on.

Multipliers don't give answers. Rather, they provide just enough information to provoke thinking, and help people discover and see the opportunity for themselves. They initiate a process of discovery.

The 3 practices of a Challenger

1. Seed the opportunity
 - Show the need. Where possible, allow people to discover it for themselves in order to get their full effort.
 - Challenge the assumptions.
 - Reframe problems. The most powerful work is often done in response to opportunities rather than problems.
 - Create a starting point—but not a complete solution. This often generates more questions than answers, encouraging the team to fully-define the opportunity.
2. Lay down a challenge
 - Extend a concrete challenge, one that draws people in.
 - Ask the hard questions. Those that prompt people not only to think, but to rethink and learn before they can answer them.
 - Let others fill the blanks. Demand iterative results so the plan can be reevaluated as new information becomes available—a 30% answer within 2 days is better than a 100% answer that took too long.
3. Generate belief in what is possible
 - Helicopter down—understand the ground-level challenges and ensure the plan addresses them so

that it seems improbable but not impossible.

- Lay out a path. Assist and guide the team to perform the research and find the insight such that the impossible becomes possible.
- Co-create the plan. Involve the team in it's creation to maximise belief in it's viability.
- Orchestrate an early win—to create belief and support. Don't try to tackle too much at once.

Becoming a Challenger

1. Ask a leading question—and stop answering them. Practice this by taking it to extremes.
2. Take a bus trip—take people offsite to see the need that must be met first-hand, as a learning experience to create energy and ignite a fire within the org.
3. Take a massive baby step—moving the entire organisation a small way, so everyone can see the results and start to believe something great is possible.

Multipliers know that even when they have a clear view of the future, simply seeding the opportunities can result in bigger, better outcomes.

4. The Debate Maker vs. the Decision Maker

Diminishers make decisions solo or with a small group around them (their “inner circle”). They may decide efficiently with this small group, but leave the wider organisation in the dark to debate the soundness of the decision instead of executing it.

In this way, Diminishers under-utilise the intelligence around them, and leave the organisation spinning rather than executing.

Examples can be subtle, e.g.:

- Asking direct reports to interview a candidate, but only go with the opinion of one or two.
- Patronising people by asking their opinion, but then making the decision privately and announcing unexpectedly.

Multipliers first engage people in debate around decisions up front. They do this to achieve sound decisions, but also decisions that are understood and prepare the organisation to execute efficiently. Multipliers:

- focus on finding out what others know.
- encourage people to stretch and challenge each other's thinking.
- create organisational will to execute the decisions made.
- realise that not all decisions need collective input and debate—but for those with significant consequence, they lead rigorous debate.
- debate—not because it makes people feel good—but to leverage everyone's intelligence and capability to make sound decisions.

The 4 elements of a great debate

1. Engaging. The question is compelling and important.
2. Comprehensive. The appropriate amount of information is shared for a holistic and collective understanding of the issues.
3. Focused on fact, not opinion.
4. Educational. People leave more focused on what was learned than who won or lost.

The 3 practices of a Debate Maker

1. Frame the issue
 - Define the questions: to unearth and challenge assumptions, surface tensions and trade-offs, force people to examine the facts, and ensure multiple perspectives.
 - Form the team. Include those with knowledge and insight, key stakeholders, and those responsible for executing the decision.
 - Assemble the data required prior to the debate. Ask others to come armed with relevant information. Opinions need to be informed by fact, not anecdote.
2. Spark the debate
 - Create safety by removing fear. Prevent people doubting themselves or holding back; save your opinions to the end.
 - Depersonalise the debate and keep it unemotional. Attack issues, not people.
 - Look beyond org hierarchy and titles.
 - Demand rigour: by asking challenging questions, demanding evidence, pursuing all sides, and seeking alternative views. Repeatedly ask “why” to find the root cause. Equally debate both sides.
3. Drive sound decisions
 - Re-clarify the decision-making process. Frame the decision. What are we deciding, why, and how—how long should we take to reach the decision, who will make recommendations, and who will decide.
 - Either make the decision, or explicitly delegate to someone else to decide.
 - Communicate the decision and rationale behind it.
 - Provide closure. Ensure people know their effort has not been wasted.
 - Don't force a decision in a way that destroys trust—e.g. by going against areas of majority agreement or referring to consensus where there is none.

Becoming a Debate Maker

Use the “shared inquiry” debate-leading technique:

1. Ask the hard question. Share your own opinions with care.
2. Ask for the data. Participants are required to give evidence to support their theories.
3. Ask each person. Everyone participates; the leader ensures the balance of voices is heard.

5. The Investor vs. the Micromanager

Akin to how a coach doesn't rush into the field and play for their team, a Multiplier avoids the temptation to jump in and solve problems for the team or take charge on the direction when things are going astray.

- Micromanagers manage every detail in a way that creates dependence on the leader and their presence for the organisation to perform.
- Investors give other people the investment and ownership they need to produce results independent of the leader.

Diminishers approach execution by maintaining ownership, jumping in and out based on their level of interest in the project, and taking back responsibility for problems they've delegated. They believe if they don't dive into the details and follow up, then other people won't deliver. “People will never figure this out without me.”

Multipliers have the core belief that “people are smart and will figure things out”. They create truly autonomous organisations that can sustain performance without their direct involvement.

The 3 practices of an Investor

1. Define ownership
 - Name the lead.
 - Assign ownership for the end goal. Optimise for the whole, not the individual piece.
 - Stretch people's roles.
2. Invest resources
 - Teach and coach—through Socratic questions.
 - Provide backup for when people get stuck, but always “give the pen back” as soon as possible to avoid overstepping.
3. Hold people accountable
 - Hand back the buck if your team come to you with problems.
 - Expect complete work. By the end, problems should be presented with accompanying solutions.
 - Respect natural consequences. Don't intervene to save the day—it makes people feel small, and they'll come to rely on it. Allow the possibility of failure.
 - Make the scoreboard visible—then people will hold themselves accountable.

Becoming an Investor

1. Let them know who's boss—ensure people know they own responsibility and must make their own decisions.
2. Let nature take its course—don't jump in and take back responsibility if you think things are going off the rails or disagree with the direction.
3. Ask for the solution, demanding completed work—not just identification of the problems.
4. Hand back the pen—when stepping in to provide guidance, avoid the temptation to finish the job.

Multipliers do get involved in the operational details, but they do so in a way that maintains the ownership by other people.

Becoming a Multiplier

The distinction between Multiplier and Diminisher exists across a spectrum; most people fall somewhere on the scale and exhibit their own varying strengths and weaknesses across the 5 disciplines.

Some leaders discover themselves to be “Accidental Diminishers”, with good intentions let down by bad habits or influence from their surrounding environment, own boss, and/or peers.

Each discipline can be worked at, and it's possible to evolve from a Diminisher to become a Multiplier.

To become a better Multiplier

1. Focus on the disciplines with your greatest strength and biggest weakness; work on those two things first. To become one of the standout best Multipliers doesn't require excellence in all the disciplines, so long as you've no great weaknesses.
2. Develop your thinking around the underlying assumptions that differentiate Multipliers from Diminishers:
 - If I can find someone's genius, I can put them to work.
 - People's best thinking must be given, not taken.
 - People get smarter by being challenged.
 - With enough minds, we can figure it out.
 - People are smart and will figure things out.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 Multipliers vs 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 Optimise talent
2. The Liberator – Require people's best thinking
3. The Challenger – Extend challenges
4. The Debate maker – Debate decisions
5. The Investor – Instil accountability

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

Chapter 2 – The Multiplier Formula

The Empire builders' vs. the Talent Magnet

Empire Builders – bring in great talent, but they underutilize it because they hoard resources and use them only for their own gain.

Talent Magnets – get access to the best talent because people flock to work for them knowing they will be fully utilized and developed to be ready for the next stage.

The Four practices of the Talent Magnet

1. Look for talent everywhere (Appreciate all types of genius, Ignore boundaries)
2. Find people's native genius (Look for what is native, Label it)
3. Utilize people to the fullest (Connect people with opportunities, Shine a spotlight)
4. Remove the blockers (Get rid of prima donnas)
5. Get out of the way

Becoming a Talent Magnet

1. Become a genius watcher
2. Pull some weeds

Unexpected Findings

Both Talent magnets and Empire Builders attract 'A' talent. What differentiates them is what they do with the talent once it is in the door

Talent Magnets do not run out of talent by moving their people onto bigger, better opportunities, because there is a steady stream of talent wanting to get into the organization

Chapter 3 – Tyrant vs. 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 to give their best effort.

The First 3 practices of the Liberator

1. Create space
 1. Release others by restraining yourself
 2. Shift the ratio of listening to talking
 3. Operate consistently
 4. Level the playing field
2. Demand best work
 1. Defend the standard
 2. Distinguish best work from outcome
3. Generate rapid learning cycles
 1. Admit and share mistakes
 2. Insist on learning from mistakes

Becoming a liberator

1. Play your chips
2. Label your opinions
3. Make your mistakes known

Unexpected findings

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

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

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

Chapter 4 – Know it all vs. the Challenger

Know it all – give directives that showcase how much they know. As a result they limit what their organization can achieve to what they themselves know how to do. The organization uses its energy what the boss thinks

Challengers – define opportunities that challenge people to go beyond what they know how to do. As a result they get an organization that understands the challenge and has the focus and energy to take it on.

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 4. Create a starting point
2. Lay down a challenge
 1. Extend a concrete challenge
 2. Ask the hard questions
 3. Let others fill in the blanks
3. Generate belief in what is possible
 1. Helicopter down
 2. Lay out a path
 3. Co create a plan
 4. Orchestrate an early win

Becoming a challenger

- Ask leading questions
- Take a bus trip
- Take a massive baby step

Unexpected findings

Even when leaders have a clear view of the future there are advantages to simply seeding the opportunities

Challenges have full range of motion, they can see and articulate the big thinking and ask the big questions, but they can also connect that to the specific steps needed to create movement

If you ask people to take on the impossible in the right way, it can actually create more safety that if you ask for something easier.

Chapter 5 – The micromanager vs. the investor

Micromanagers – manage every detail in a way that creates dependence on the leader and their presence for the organization to perform

Investors – give other people the investment and ownership they need to produce results independent of the leader

The 3 practices of the Investor

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 1. Name the lead
 2. Give ownership for the end goal
 3. Stretch the role
2. Invest resources
 1. Teach and coach
 2. Provide backup
3. Hold people accountable
 1. Expect complete work
 2. Respect natural consequence
 3. Make the scoreboard visible

Becoming an Investor

- Let them know who is the boss
- Let nature take its course
- Ask for the F-I-X
- Hand back the pen

Unexpected findings

Multipliers do get involved in the operational details by they keep the ownership with other people

Multipliers are rated 45% higher at delivering world class results than the Diminisher counterparts

Chapter 6 – The lazy way strategy

Use the right principles and tools to attain maximum results with just the right amount of effort

The Accelerators

1. Work the extremes – assess your leadership practices and then focus your development on the two extremes – 1. Bring up your lowest low and 2. Take your highest level to the next level
2. Start with the assumptions – adopt the assumptions of a Multiplier and allow the behaviour and practices to naturally follow
 1. If I can find someone's genius I can put them to work
 2. People's best thinking must be given, not taken
 3. People get smarter by being challenged
 4. With enough minds, we can figure it out.
3. Taking a 30 day multiplier challenge – pick one practice within one discipline and work it for 30 days
 - Maintaining momentum
 - Build it layer by layer
 - Stay with it for a year
 - Build a community

