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Article Critique #4

TECH 50000 - Quality Standards

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ARE YOU AN ACCIDENTAL DIMINISHER?

By: Greg McKeown and Liz Wiseman

Leadership | July / August 2010

Summary

This article examines the following two leader types and what impacts they have on organizations.

1. Intelligence Diminisher – The type of leader that underutilizes a worker's talent or who makes them question their own intelligence.
2. Intelligence Multiplier – The type of leader that draws on every ounce of the worker's brainpower and even makes them smarter and more capable.

The authors of this article conducted a 20-year observational research of 150 leaders in 35 companies across 4 continents to determine the differences between these two leader types, as well as the impacts they have on organizations. The study found that both leader types have similar characteristics such as both are customer focused, have good business acumen, and consider themselves thought leaders. However, each leader type sees the world with different eyes in terms of employee intelligence. The diminisher type leader assumes that employees cannot figure things out without help. This type of leader underutilizes the talent of employees by telling them what to do, making decisions themselves, creating pressure, and micromanaging the details to ensure performance. The multiplier type leader believes that employees are smart enough to figure things out. The multiplier leader commands employees' best work by looking for valuable talent, giving space to think, and instilling accountability, as well as asking challenging questions that unlock thinking and generate possibilities.

The study also found that multipliers essentially double the intellectual power of their workforce for free. Another surprise finding was that many leaders didn't realize the management practices they thought were empowering their employees were actually limiting or restricting them from using their intelligence. These types of leaders are accidental diminishers. Accidental diminisher leaders want more employees to report to them, have the gift of gab, are visionaries and rapid responders, and jump in to rescue an employee. For a diminisher to transform into a multiplier, the authors suggests three powerful starting points that include (1) shift from giving answers to asking questions that cause people to stop, think, and rethink; (2) dispense ideas in small doses which will create room for others to contribute; and (3) expect complete work, meaning people learn best when they are fully accountable and face the consequences of their work.

The authors use a renewable energy company as an example to prove their arguments. The company in question had hired a very talented person who had gained rich foreign trade experience while being employed at the Brazilian embassy. The company felt that this particular new hire would contribute greatly to their efforts in expanding rapidly into Brazil. However, the leader was constantly stepping in to help the new hire instead of utilizing his full intelligence. By doing this for a few months, it was determined that person hired was only using 20 to 25 percent of his talent on the job. After learning about this particular research, the leader of this company changed his perspectives and within a couple of weeks the new hire was utilizing 80 percent of his intelligence.

My Thoughts

This article taught me new ways of understanding different aspects of leadership techniques. The authors' naming and definition of these leader types makes it easier to understand the differences between them. The way I see it, not only is being a multiplier leader good for the overall success of a company, it enables employees to learn and grow in their careers. Diminisher leaders are not only hurting their companies by not utilizing the full intelligence of their employees, they are (like the article states) "career killers." By reading this article I also see a difference between actual diminishers and accidental diminishers. Because accidental diminishers do try to empower their employees, I think they could easily change, or should I say fix, their perspectives pertaining to their current leadership techniques and convert to multipliers. On the other hand, I feel that actual diminisher leaders would be harder to transform into multipliers because they seem to be more like an "old dog set in its ways." However, companies in all types of industry can learn the right leadership techniques from this study. Being a multiplier leader who utilizes the talents of workers by asking questions fosters teamwork and innovation. This article puts real value to the old saying, "Two minds together are better than one!"

Something else I realized when reading this article is that multiplier leaders are not only found in the workforce, but in the classroom as well. At least with our quality standards class, that is. The online discussion topics enable students to learn from each other. And, I have noticed that some of those students are multiplier leaders, in that they encourage interaction by asking questions of other students.