

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/blog/videos/the-power-of-not-knowing-entire-talk>

Author and leadership educator Liz Wiseman shares why cultivating a “rookie mindset” is an advantage in a rapidly changing world. Wiseman presents insights from her books, “Rookie Smarts” and “Multipliers,” including frameworks and techniques for how entrepreneurs, leaders and employees can embrace a life of constant learning and build a passion for multiplying the genius of those around them.



Transcript

So I want to have a conversation with everyone here.. And I'm going to ask everyone to participate in this conversation about intelligence, and the use of intelligence inside of our organizations.. And by intelligence, I mean just pure raw, brilliance and intellect.. And also, its sibling, practical know-how.. And we're in a place in the world right here in Silicon Valley, I was raised here in Silicon Valley, I've worked here my whole career, where we are attracted to intelligence.. We love the idea of the brilliant founder.. We love the idea of the technical expert, the experienced engineer, because for us, it represents possibilities, innovation, perhaps the promise of the next big thing.. But it also represents safety and comfort, particularly in an industry where things don't stand still for very long.. But today, I want us to explore the dark side, the downside of intelligence.. Is there a danger in knowing too much? And by this, I don't mean kind of like a spy movie danger of knowing too much like "okay, he knows too much, we need to take him outside and take care of him." I'm talking about a danger to our companies, a danger to our teams and a danger to innovation..

In exploring this, I want to explore some twin questions.. One being "how does what we know get in the way of what we don't know, but perhaps need to learn?" And I also want to explore this question, is it possible that really smart leaders don't create smart organizations, that really smart leaders can shut down intelligence and brilliance and ideas and innovation around them.. Now, these two questions come, and I'm going to draw on two bodies of research.. The work I did around Multipliers, why the best leaders make everyone smarter, and this more recent look at the power of being a rookie.. And I want - both of these bodies of research explore the power of enquiry, and I think for the next 50 minutes that we have together, I just want to invite you into this space with me where we explore the power, not of knowing, but the power of knowing nothing at all, or the power of not knowing.. I want to start with this - the first question here is, when does not knowing tend to be an advantage? Is there an upside to not knowing? And from this, what I want you to do is I want you to Star Trek style teleport yourself.. Are there any Trekkie fans here in the room? Okay.. Is there anyone who can hum a mean version of the original theme song? Anyone up for it? Can you get it in your mind, because what I want to do, I want you to put yourself in the teleporter.. And I want you to transport yourself back in place and back in time when you were doing something new and something really hard for the very first time.. I want you to go back to one of your rookie experiences..

And I want you to start to lock it in.. So like, give me the look when I can tell you figure out one of these and I want you to go back and I want you to start thinking about these questions.. What could you see that other people couldn't? Who did you seek out for guidance? What did you do to prove yourself and what did you do to stay on track? This might be a project that you were given a couple of weeks ago, and some of you might go back years in time.. I want to start - and I want your mind to wander as I share with you my own rookie experience and I want you to wander back to your own, because I have some questions I'm going to ask you about this.. Let me start with my own rookie experience.. This was back about 26 years ago.. I graduated from school with an MBA, I take a job at this kind of mid-size start-up company that's just recently gone public, Oracle.. All my friends said, what's that? Do you guys make toothbrushes? And it was this rapidly growing company I start at, and despite the fact that my background is in business, I was asked to take a job as a technical trainer, meaning teaching programming to all of Oracle's new recruits.. We were gobbling up engineers as fast as we could from the top universities.. I actually - at the time, I wanted to teach leadership, of all things..

And my VP said, Liz, that's great.. But we don't actually have a leadership problem right now.. What we have is we have a knowledge transfer problem, we have all these new people, we need to get them up-to-speed on Oracle technology fast.. And

why don't you help us get that done? So sensing that this was probably important to the life blood of the company, I signed up for this job, knowing virtually nothing about Oracle technology and actually knowing not a whole lot about any technology.. But I stapled myself to that problem.. About a year later, as the company is adding people by the thousands, they said you know what, we actually need someone to manage the training department for this company: Liz, you are now the training manager for Oracle.. And by the way, Larry Ellison, our founder, he wants a university.. He wants Oracle University, so we need you to go and to build that.. I am 24 years old.. I now barely know something about Oracle technology and I know absolutely nothing about building a university..

In fact, the only thing I really knew was that this was a grown-up job and I wasn't quite yet a grown-up.. But no one seemed to be bothered by that, but me.. So I got in and started working on this.. Now, the one thing I did know is that in a company - a technology company, nothing is more important than technology transfer and that we as a company weren't going to grow unless we could get product know-how in all of our field operations.. I had no idea about how to build a university.. And my value actually didn't come from having fresh ideas, my value really came from having no ideas at all.. Because what happens when you know nothing.... You create something.. You're forced to create something, and because I didn't know how to do it, I went out and asked.. Now, I knew product knowledge transfer was the key to the company..

So I went out and talked to every one of the product bosses, what problems that they have, and I talked to people who needed to transfer - we decided to keep things simple.. Rather than build a standalone campus, we used some of the space in existing buildings, we kept.... instead of hiring instructors and technical experts and getting them up-to-speed, we went to the product bosses and asked them to take on this additional responsibility.. Because we knew it would be accurate, we knew we would get access to the experts, and we knew it would be fast.. Once we had shaped our university, one of the things I knew we needed is a little bit of gravitas, kind of a little bit of a university feel.. And so we decided we needed a crest, because what's a university without a crest? And we wanted a mantra, something that would signify what we were all about.. We chose "knowledge is power", okay? Now, I had been to a university, and the thing I knew is that the mantra needed to be in Latin, right? And I looked around at my colleagues and none of us knew Latin.. And so with a distinct shortage of knowledge on Latin, what might you do? Go to Google.. Go to Google.. A ridiculous idea 25 years ago, but very nice indeed..

There was no Google.. There was no Google translate and so what do you do? I decided that there were probably people at Stanford who knew Latin, there are probably a professor or two on this campus who probably can do this, because I need this translated.. And so I picked up the phone, it had a little curly cord at the time, and it was attached to its base, and I phoned up the Stanford switchboard and I said, "Could you connect me to the classics department?" And they did, and I got to the receptionist and I said, could you perhaps connect me to a professor of Latin? And they did, and he answered his phone, because we did that back in those days.. And I told him what I was doing, that we were building this university inside of Oracle and we needed this gravitas, and this Latin sort of mantra and I asked if it would be possible if he might just translate this for me.. I mean it was only three words, right? And so he did.. He said, well, that's sapere est valere and I said, okay, wait, could you repeat that again really slowly and spell that for me.. And he did and I wrote it down, and I placed my next phone call to Oracle's T-shirt vendor, and I said could you make a T-shirt with sapere est valere collegiate, and he did.. I brought that T-shirt and I fished this out of the old wardrobe.. It's actually not one of the original T-shirts, it's a sweatshirt, because that's what you get when you are the manager of the department.. And here it is, sapere est valere Oracle University, knowledge is power..

I have come to realize that actually knowledge isn't power anymore, that it's really a very, very old slogan.. But anyway, nonetheless, we proceeded with this idea that knowledge is power, we built this university, we were getting stuff done, we were working fast, we were scrapping, they asked us to globalize this.. Make it work in 120 different countries.. I mentioned to my management, I said, I actually have never been outside the United States and I don't really even have a passport.. No one seemed to worry.. They said, get a passport, and get it expedited, start in Europe, figure it out.. It was all going very well until the day that my new boss, the head of human resources, came into my office, sat down and he said, "Liz, the company is growing really rapidly," as if I didn't know this.. And he said, it's probably time that we have someone with experience to lead our university.. He said tomorrow, I've got a candidate coming in for the job.. My job..

And his name was Jay.. And I was devastated, I loved this job.. I was having the time of my life doing it but yet even in my devastation, I could see the wisdom in bringing someone in with some experience, some savvy, some maturity.. He left my office and it left me to wonder, should I stay and learn from said experienced executive, or should I go? The next day, in came Jay, and he looked every part the experienced executive.. He looked exactly like the kind of person that you should hire to run a university, and as I was contemplating this, the very next day, my boss came back in and sat down, and with a dignity that I will remember my entire life he said, Liz, we are not going to hire Jay.. In fact, we are not going to hire anyone for your job, we would like you to stay in the job.. I realized something probably interesting must have happened that day, and he said I was wrong.. See, when I went out to talk to those executives whom had interviewed Jay, they were angry.. They said, we don't need someone with experience doing this, Liz and her team are doing a phenomenal job, they were adamant that I stay in this job.. And I was baffled, and I decided to stay..

I was baffled, why? I mean why would they have like naive rookie me in such an important job for the company? And I have come to understand it better, because I had no ideas of my own, I was forced to seek guidance and stay close to these stakeholders.. Because I needed to prove myself, we operated in thin slices.. What - today, we would probably call lean or

agile, delivering quick wins.. Exactly what the customer needed when they needed it, because we knew no other way of working.. This was one of my rookie experiences.. Have you been - I hope your mind has been wandering, thinking about your own rookie experiences.. This is what I'd like you to do.. You've got a hand-out here, if you flip to the back of it, there are a few questions.. I want you to teleport yourself, go back to when you were brand new to something important and hard.. It could be a subject matter, it could be a project, a job you've had, and I want you to take a minute and answer as many of those questions as you can..

Okay, keep thinking about that.. I want to hear about your experience in what I call the rookie zone.. Clueless, naive, doing something important and hard, what did you do? And perhaps, what did you not do? Okay, start me off with what did you do? What did you do to prove yourself? And I'm just going to ask you to shout it out.. Work really hard.. You worked really hard, thank you for getting us started.. You? I was in a discovery mode.. I was in discovery mode.. Keep going.. You? Move country.. You moved country, interesting..

Keep going.. What did you do? I went for help.. I went for help.. You went for help.. What else did you do? Team with others.. You teamed up with other people.. Started from the basics.. You started from the basic.. When we're in this rookie mode, I find that we operate in what I call pioneer mode.. We are out on the frontier, and we don't have the very basics that we need..

We don't have the basic confidence, so we focus on the basics.. It's why we operate in this lean kind of model.. What else did you do? Ask a lot of whys? You asked a lot of whys, often we're asking the naive questions, the very things that help us get to the essence of an issue.. What else did you do? What did you not do? Assume anything.. You didn't assume anything, because often we don't know anything.. What else did you not do? Didn't give up.. You didn't give up, you persist, because you have to.. Once you're out in that valley, almost like the valley of despair, and you've gone far enough into that zone of discomfort and unknown, you make a calculation: can I go back? And if I can't go back, you just persist.. Anything else that you notice about reflecting about your own rookie experience.. Let me share with you what we found in our research..

So in my research I studied about 400 different scenarios.. Pieces of work, projects like debug a program, write a proposal, teach a class, build a campus.. And we looked at how experienced people did that and how people who are rookies doing it for their very first time did that work.. Looked at the common elements.. Here's what we found.. The first thing we found is that experience creates a number of blind spots.. Now with experience, we obviously get knowledge, wisdom, we gather data points which actually informs our powers of intuition.. We build confidence, we build networks, but we create blind spots.. What happens when we know the pattern? What happens when we know the code, so to speak? What do our minds do once we have seen a pattern before? You stop innovating.. You stop....

...innovating.. You stop innovating.. What do you stop seeing? Possibilities.. You stop seeing opportunities, you stop seeing possibilities and sometimes, we start, as my teenager say, making stuff up like "Mom, you just make stuff up." Sometimes, we fill in the gaps.. Is there someone with a nice loud voice who would read this for us? I will.. Yeah, thanks.. Make it loud for us.. It doesn't matter in what order the letters in a word appear, the only important thing is that the first and last letters are in the right place.. The rest can be a total mess and you can still read it without problem.. Okay..

And keep going for us, you've done a really nice job and it sounds good too.. Your mind is reading this automatically without even thinking about it.. What happens when we know the pattern? We fill things in.. And sometimes we start answering questions before the question has actually been asked.. Sometimes we stop seeing new data points, we stop seeing contrary points of view.. Often once we know the patterns, we stop seeking feedback, input.. As was said, we stop seeing new possibilities and with experience typically comes bad experience and scar tissue.. And what do our scars - you might think about the scars that you have on your body, what do they tell you? They remind you about your mistakes that you've made.. This one reminds me do not bet your husband a cheeseburger that you can hit a ball at 70-mile per hour in the fast pitch cage, don't do that again.. And I have a whole set of scars that remind me not to do things that didn't seem to work out very well the first time..

And as you enter into the workforce, you will have ideas that touch on people's scar tissues, and they will quickly say, no, no, tried that, didn't work.. Experience creates a number of troubling blind spots.. We also found that experience - inexperience, ignorance even, can drive top performance.. And rather than show you a lot of data that I found, I thought we would just take kind of a walk up a really steep learning curve, and compare that what it looks like when we're competent, we know how to do something and we get incrementally better.. So the learning curve starts right here in the phase of ignorance.. This is ignorance is bliss and we are saying to ourselves as we're given something important and hard - hey, how hard can this be, I can do it.. Because what do we see in this phase? We see this little gentle ascent.. But then very quickly we start to dig into this and we go into the awareness phase where we realize no, actually, this is hard.. And we're starting to see this ascent, this curve, a little steeper.. But what we're really seeing is a gap between what we can do and what the people around us can do..

And what are we saying to ourselves in this moment? And feel free to give it to me unfiltered.. Consciously incompetent.. Yeah, now, I am consciously incompetent.. Which it is way more fun to be unconsciously incompetent, isn't it? Yeah, we don't like dwelling in our ignorance.. What are we saying to ourselves? Oh, shoot.. Yeah, we start to swear, and this is why I think

they call it the S-curve, right? Because we start to use swear words.. Then we move very quickly into the state of desperation.. We start to panic, and we're looking around for there's got to be someone who knows what they are doing here who can help me.. And this is where we start to reach out, this is where the most powerful form of learning happens, because the most powerful learning isn't ever in the classroom, it's not because someone gave us a curriculum, told us to take these classes or as you join the company and they give you competence models and tell you these are the courses that you need to take.. The most powerful form of learning comes when we're desperate, when we have no choice but to learn, when it's more painful not to learn than it is to just scramble up this steep learning curve..

Then we move into the stage when we contribute, because we have got no points on the board up until this point, and then we need to put some points on, we put them on fast.. And sometimes when we contribute, we contribute really big.. What we found in the research is that when we compare how veterans versus rookies, experienced people versus inexperienced people perform, we find that across broad industries as you might expect, people who have experience outperform people with inexperience, but by a small margin.. It was remarkably small.. However, when we cut that data in the knowledge industries, we found that people with inexperience tend to outperform people with experience also by a small margin.. But where they really outperform is when the work is innovative in nature, and they out perform in speed.. Actually, rookies are a lot faster than people with experience.. It's because they are desperate, because they are desperate.. And then after a contribution, we start to get comfortable.. This is where we start to teach other people and we mentor other people..

And if we're not careful, we continue to see this line of performance and contribution and learning continuing at this steep ascent, and it feels good.. But in reality, we start to settle in and we get comfortable.. As I looked at this, and I looked at these top performing rookies, I found this really interesting breed of rookie.. I call them the perpetual rookie.. Successful professional, successful leaders, successful entrepreneurs with years of experience and years of mastery who, despite that, maintain what I call, their rookie smarts.. Their ability to think and approach their work as if they were doing it for the very first time.. As I look at this incredible type of professional, I found a number of traits in common, what might you think they would share in common kind of at their core character traits? Risk takers.. Are they big risk takers? It's interesting, we find that rookies themselves are not big risk takers at all.. They are risk mitigators, like very successful entrepreneurs.. They learn how to operate in thin slices and take risk out of a thing..

What else would you expect? Never satisfied.. Not satisfied, interesting.. Yeah, there's kind of an abhorrence of mediocrity slipping into their organization, it's extremely deliberate about how they do that.. Any other hypotheses about what might you expect to find? Curious.. Curious is one - the first thing we found is they are curious, they tend to be humble.. And I don't mean with this sense of like low sense of self, a lowly approach to life.. I mean willing to learn from anyone and everyone, up down, side to side, we find that they are playful.. And it's not that they bring ping pong tables and futsal tables into the workplace.. It's not like they try to create fun amid the work.. For them, their work just is fun..

And how do you operate when work is just fun? Yeah.. And that we find that they are very deliberate, very deliberate.. Let me share with you a few of the ways that we find that they maintain their rookie smarts.. As I looked at what was common across so many of these interesting leaders and professionals, they all had a deliberate ritual, something that helped them go back to their rookie roots.. This is Bob Hurley, I imagine some of you - anyone sporting some Hurley brand right now? Bob started Hurley Sports as a surfboard shaper.. He built this company into this large global successful enterprise that he then sold to Nike.. He is still the CEO of this company, and he described his journey to build Hurley Sports.. He said at every juncture I had no idea what I was doing, and it turned out to be an advantage.. And rather than tell you about the series of rookie moves, I think what's more interesting about Bob is how he maintains this playful but ferocious drive in his work.. I went down to see and spend some time with Bob and you could tell he is just a playful, joyful leader..

I said Bob, how do you maintain it? And he said, I have my good days.. I have the days when ideas flow and I am just kind of in that sort of groove, and I have days when I'm absolutely stuck in a rut.. And he said, on those days, I remembered something that happened many years ago on Huntington Beach.. So Bob began his career as a surfer.. And on Huntington Beach, I don't know if there is anyone here who comes from Huntington Beach, but it sounds like a clique that's probably a more tighter clique than at a high school.. And there is parts of the beach which are sort of reserved for the elite surfers.. And then there are other parts of the beach that are sort of relegated to the kind of mere mortals.. Now, Bob was just on the outer edge of this group of elite surfers, and he is out surfing one day kind of in the prime waves and he loses his board.. And he goes under the pier to go fetch his board and on the other side of the pier he see someone he knows, it's Wayne Bartholomew.. He is the reigning world champion surfer from Australia..

And they call him Rabiid.. And he sees him surfing over kind of the lesser waves, the baby waves, and he shouts out to him, he's like.... and I do come from California, I should probably be able to do a decent job of this.. And he says something to the effect of "Dude, dude, you are a legend.. Like hey, come surf with us over here, the waves are like righteous, we're stoked." Or something like this, and the world champion surfer says to him, he says like "that's kind of you mate, but I like to surf over here with the kids, it's where I get my energy." And Bob said, one of the things that's helped and maintained this rookie point of view is he said, when I have those bad days, I go out and I surf with the amateurs.. Sometimes, I grab my board and I literally go surfing.. And he goes down to the beach not to surf with the Hurley-sponsored surfers, most of them he knows.. He goes down and he surfs with the kids, the young, and the young at heart and it's where he regains his energy.. And on days where the waves aren't good or he doesn't have the time, he simply walks down the hall and he seeks out the newcomers, the

recent college grads, the rookies, or the people who are in a rookie assignment.. And he spends his time there learning from them, and they revitalize his own point of view..

This is Francois Truffaut, a French film director who before he died in his 50s, he had directed 25 films.. He had this interesting ritual: as he began each film, he would go back to the bookstore in Paris where he first bought a book.. When he was directing his very first film, he bought a book on how to direct a film.. He goes back to the bookstore, rebuys the book, rereads the book to remember what it was like when he didn't know how to do this.. A very dear mentor of mine, Dr.. C.. K.. Prahalad from the University of Michigan, who - this incredibly renowned management scholar, lecturer, who is this - he was a fire hazard to the university because his courses were perpetually oversubscribed, people just flocked the halls to hear him.. He passed about four years ago, and at his memorial his wife shared a story with us.. She had been in his office, and she found in the trash bin, she found this stack of notes, and they looked important and she pulled them out..

These were C.. K's lecture notes.. And that evening, she says to him, Prahalad, I found your lecture notes.. And he said, thank you, but I put them there.. And she was in shock, I mean horrified, I mean his most precious valuable professional resource.. He said I throw them away every semester because I think my students deserve my best thinking, fresh examples and fresh thinking every semester.. He threw away his teaching notes.. And lastly, an entrepreneur, a CEO of an Internet firm here in the Valley who said to me when he gets stuck and feels like his company isn't innovating, he says, I go for a long walk in one direction and I don't allow myself to turn back until I've had a legitimately novel idea.. And he said some day, these walks are really long.. And if that's not extreme enough, he said, on the really tough days, I go into my closet and he said, now, you can't tell anyone my name..

Because he goes into his closet he strips down to next to nothing, or I kind of got the sense it was to nothing.. And he says, and I just think.. Now, I am not in anyway suggesting you do this, certainly not while you have roommates.. But I thought it was an interesting practice because what is he shedding, I don't think it's that's he's shedding his outer clothes, he's shedding what? Assumptions Assumptions, beliefs, practices, shedding that down, stripping down to the core so he can see things fresh.. I think if I've - I've learned anything studying rookies, studying these people I call perpetual rookies, it's this: It's that when we work in our rookie space, when we're actually in our space of not knowing, it's powerful.. We tend to operate at our very best.. For some reason, it pulls out the very best in us.. But the other thing I have learned in talking to people about what's it's like working in a space of unknown, it is actually where we feel our greatest joy.. It's where we feel our most satisfied, people say, I want to be a rookie again because I felt so alive.. I want to share this video with you..

This is a clip from Zia.. She is a fourth grade, young lady who is attempting the 40-meter ski jump.. And this is Park City, Utah, and if the technology works right, we'll play it.. It's amazing.. This is Zia.. Zia with a Go-Pro.. She says 60 feet seems like nothing now.. I mean, don't we all want to work with Zia? But I think there's a Zia in all of us that's a little bit afraid to go into this place where we don't know what we're doing.. I know a lot of you are going to be graduating, some of you taking jobs and some of you starting companies, you might think about the place where you do your very best work.. It might not be in your place of competence, it might actually be in your place of inquiry, which often comes from incompetence..

You might choose - I have had no other career strategy other than don't spend a lot of time in jobs that you're qualified for.. In fact, spend zero time in jobs that you're qualified for.. Work in this scary space.. I want us to move to a second question, a related question.. And the question is, can smart leaders create dumb teams? Is sometimes the knowledge of the leader a disadvantage to an entire organization.. Or you might ask yourself the inverse question, which is why are we so smart and capable around some leaders, but not around others? I'm going to ask you, similar to going back to when you were in a brand new job, I want you to go back and think about two different kinds of leaders.. I want you to think about a leader that I came to call a multiplier, someone around whom you did your very best work, you were at your smartest and most capable.. Okay.. I want you to start to lock someone in, because I'm going to ask you about your experience.. I also want you to think about someone that we call a diminisher..

They are perhaps very smart, but people around them aren't, surrounded by smart people, hard problems don't get solved.. Let me share, if the technology on this works, another video of two types of leaders.. Would you be thinking about two types of leaders you've been around, they could be teachers, they could be a little league coach, maybe someone that you worked for.. Here we go.. Okay.. We've got it.. Pretty simple idea, have you been thinking about someone who was a leader to you? Here's what I want you to - I have got - they look like four questions, but it's really two questions.. The first question, and I want you to maybe just make a note, with your diminisher, what did this person do? Could you maybe jot down a couple words, maybe verbs, actions.. What could you see in his or her behavior? And then I want you to write down a number.. What percentage of your intelligence or capability did this leader get from you on a scale of zero to 100? Now, it's a bit of a tricky question because I am not asking you how hard you were working..

How much of your brain power were they getting access to based on the way he or she led.. And then maybe write something down for your multiplier leader, what did he or she do and what did they get? Do you need a minute to put some thoughts together? Okay.. Take a minute.. Okay.. Some of you might need to keep thinking about this, but I want to hear about your experience.. And I think it will be more interesting than me just sharing what we found in the research on this.. What is it that your diminisher did? They - Micro managing.. They micro managed, they.... They created a thinly veiled my way or highway approach.. They created a thinly veiled my way or highway approach, I like that, very thinly veiled..

They.... Talked at people, not talking with people.. They talked at people.. They operate in 'tell mode'.. What else did they do? Interrupt.. They interrupt.. They.... They emphasize their superiority.. They emphasize their superiority.. You know how every meeting is going to end, that they are going to look like the smartest guy in the room..

Okay, in the back, shout it nice and loud, they.... They reminded me that I don't have enough experience.. They reminded me that I don't have enough experience, that you maybe don't know enough.. Oh, you can't do this.. What else did they do? They're always right.. They were always right.. How much of your capability did they get? Can we just maybe go to this row right here? Will you quickly shout out that number? And I have a feeling there are people in this room who can calculate a pretty quick average.. So if you're one of those people, you can either do it mass savant style in your head, or grab a calculator.. 50.. 50? 15..

15.. 35.. 35.. 20.. 20.. 30.. 30.. 25.. 25.. 40..

40.. 20.. 20.. Is there anyone else who for just maybe therapeutic reasons needs to share that number? I realize that's not great data collection.. Did anyone calculate an average across those numbers? Okay, if not, we are crowd sourcing this average.. And he says.... Audience Member 27.5%.. Liz Wiseman 27.5%, I mean it's got to be right, because he's got something to the right of the decimal point, it sounds right! Okay.. 27 - can we round up to 28? Just to go nuts here.. I know it's a small - 28% of the available intelligence being used..

And we find this is rampant across organizations.. What did your diminisher believe to be true? Could you get inside their head? What were they thinking? They knew better.. That they knew better, which is so easy when you are put - some of you here have had this experience, some of you are soon to have this experience when you get put in your first management role.. Why were you put there? Charm, good looks, or is it because you're smart? And it's very easy to conclude I am the smartest one on the team, that's why they put me in charge.. Therefore, my job is to tell, micro-manage, interrupt, show a better way.. How about your multiplier? What did your multiplier do in contrast? They.... Were supportive.. They were supportive.. They trusted they.... Listen..

They listened.. Made you feel important.. They made you feel important.. They.... Asked questions.. ...they asked questions.. Got out of our way.. They got out of the way.. They sought help.. They appreciate it..

They gave appreciation.. You have all captured what I consider some of the soft empowering sides of these kind of leaders.. But we found these leaders, they tend to have a hard edge.. My publisher looked at the first version of my manuscript for the book and she wrote back and she said, well, these aren't really cupcakes and kisses kinds of leaders, are they? They are demanding.. They have a hard edge.. What was on the hard edge of your multiplier leader? They.... Had high expectations.. They have high expectations.. They.... Challenged..

They challenge.. We find that they're challenging their leaders who have become really comfortable asking other people to be uncomfortable.. They are the leaders who let you squirm a little bit.. They are leaders who, despite the fact that they might be really good hearted people, they let you suffer a bit.. Your best professors, suffering around them, or just tons of fun, or a little of both, a little of both.. Here's what we found in the research.. Diminishers stuck to this belief that no one's going to figure it out without me.. They operate from a place of knowledge, their knowledge and certainty.. And the things that we found that they do very different, it starts with how they manage talent, they tend to be empire builders.. And they love to hire smart people..

These people come on to campuses like this and they scoop up the smartest, brightest minds they can.. But there is a danger in this, because what they do with them then? Often these brilliant, brilliant people become like little knick-knacks in grandma's curio cabinet, sort of there to be seen but not well used.. And you don't want a job like that.. In fact you probably want to shop for a boss, or be a boss, that sees talent very differently.. The work environments they create, they tend to be tyrants, not yelling, chair-throwing tyrants, but creating anxiety and stress.. They tend to be know-it-alls, decision-makers, micro-managers.. Conversely, we find they get less than half of people's capability, and the corporate world is replete with these kinds of leaders.. Multipliers on the other hand operate from a belief that people around me are smart and they're going to figure it out.. I hired them smart, and they're probably still smart on week two or month two or year two, and they manage in very different ways.. They tend to be talent magnets, liberators, challengers, debate makers, and investors giving ownership and accountability to other people..

Again, they are leaders who push people out into this place.. They are leaders who operate from a place of inquiry, we find they get almost all of people's intelligence and capability.. Where is the tendency for the smartest kinds of professionals and most capable people? Where is the path of least resistance? Is it the multiplier or is it the diminisher? We find - I started my research seeing these kinds of leaders as these like wild, egomaniac tyrants.. I found it's actually not the case that much, if not most, of the diminishing done in our companies is done with the very best of intentions.. It's done by well-intended people who think they are doing a good job leading.. Let me quickly share some of the ways that we see this, the idea guy.. The smart, creative person who spouts ideas not because their ideas are better, because they think their ideas are going to do what? Spark others.. Yeah, spark other ideas.. But what actually happens around an idea guy, someone who has all the ideas? Or the always on leader.. Their sort of big presence, a charismatic leader, always something to say, always something to

contribute, always got their hand up so to speak..

Or the rescuer, the leader that doesn't like to see people struggle, suffer, make mistakes or fail, and often simply extending a hand of help.. Or the pace-setter who leads by example thinking I'll set the pace for the project, for the assignment, for the task at work, other people will notice what I am doing and they'll follow.. But what actually happens? Do people speed to catch up? You don't.. Like my youngest son who loves to race Mom to the bus stop, well, he loves it because he wins or it's really close, right? But what about the days where I forget? And I think you know what, this might be the last - not only is this the last kid, this might be the last person on the planet I can run faster than, right? And so I speed and I get to the bus first and I look back and what's he doing? Walking.. He's walking.. He is walking kind of a saunter.. And what does he say when he catches up? And you need to put your eight-year-old boy logic on for a second.. He says.... Unfair, cheating.. It's unfair, you cheated, that's kind of seven..

It's slightly more sophisticated.. What does he say? I wasn't trying.. It's a version of "I wasn't trying." He says, well, mom, we weren't racing that time, right, because what do you do when you can't keep up with the superstar, or the bus.. Yeah, it's no longer a competition.. The rapid responder, he isn't an optimist.. How might you, maybe on your project teams in your work for those of you who are going to be starting companies, how might you be shutting down intelligence and capability around you, with the very best of intentions.. I think we are at our time.. I want to spend some time on questions and things that you want to know more about, or simply comments.. Let me offer a couple final closing thoughts.. One of the most powerful shifts that you can make as a leader or as a contributor is shifting from the place of knowing, and operating from the place of inquiry..

Most of us begin our careers needing to find answers.. But as we move into a leadership role, nothing is more important than being able to ask the right questions, the questions that share that burden of thinking with your team, the questions that focus the energy and intelligence of a group.. I think living here in Silicon Valley, I know a lot of you will be going into technology kinds of careers.. We have to move beyond the brilliant founder, the team of technical experts if you want to create an organization that's going to solve a problem at scale.. Or if you want to build an enduring organization, you need to rely more on your own brilliance and to look at the brilliance of the team, that's the most powerful role that a leader can play.. And in those organizations, the best leaders not only give people a pat on the back, they give them a push, a push out of their comfort zone and into a space where they are operating in the unknown and draw upon the power of not knowing to create a culture of brilliance, a culture of contribution and a culture of innovation.. I would love to hear your comments, questions, observations, shout out.. The person who goes into the closet, is he a founder of Google? The person who goes into the closet, is he a founder of Google? No.. And even if he was, the answer would still be no.. Another question, here at the back, nice and loud..

Is there a spectrum from multipliers to diminishers and can people that self-identify at one point there get help? Yeah, is there a spectrum from multipliers to diminishers, I hope so.. Because I know that I am not one of these kind of textbook multipliers, but I also hope I am not the raging diminisher.. I think in between is this place of accidental diminisher, and I've stopped seeing people as either multipliers or diminishers, and more looking and coaching leaders to just have fewer diminishing moments and stringing together a lot more multiplier moments.. Right here.. How do you walk the fine line between making people suffer, and at the same time keeping them motivated to work for you? How do you walk the fine line between making people suffer and keeping them motivated? Let me share something I learned from a Stanford grad.. He got both his undergrad and his masters here at Stanford, I was very fortunate to hire him into Oracle.. He went on to work for McKinsey, and he ran, this is Jay Choi, he ran the Seoul office for McKinsey.. And I was interviewing him for my research on multipliers and he said something interesting to me, he said, Liz, when your people are struggling, it's irresponsible not to help.. He said, but you have to remember to hand the pen back.. And I wasn't sure what he was talking about..

And he explained a moment in time, it's 2:00 a.m.. in the Seoul office.. All the lights are out except this one conference room because Jay and a project team have a huge deliverable for the next day.. They are putting - they have been doing a business transformation.. So they are putting together the pitch for this client on how they're going to take the project to the next level, it is their most important Pan-Asian client.. It's 2:00 a.m.. and the team is dead in the water, stuck.. They are trying to come up with a story and they have got nothing.. And at one point, the project leader turns to Jay like, "hey, we could use a little help." Jay is a very experienced consultant.. He's been in their shoes a long time..

He is there as the executive sponsor.. And so he takes the pen from the project leader and he goes up to the board and he starts to map it out because he can see the issues, the themes are clear to him.. And he starts to lay it out, and you can only imagine how good this feels.. It's almost like this intoxicating feeling of rescuing, saving the day, and he's laying out the storyboard, and about two-thirds of the way through his idea he stops.. And the multiplier in him signals restraint.. And he just pauses there, he turns back to the project leader, hands the pen back.. And he said, "here are a few ideas to get you started, why don't you take it from there?" He said, when your people are struggling, it is responsible not to help, but you've got to remember to hand the pen back.. What's the pen? Responsibility, control, accountability.. Help people get out of the ditch, but put them back in the lead is I think the way you keep people from suffering too much.. And make sure they are in charge and they are driving and motivated..

Other questions, other thoughts? One more.. One more and right here.. How do you deal with diminishers, other than

leaving the job? How do you deal with diminishers, other than leaving the job? Okay, that's a great question.. What if you work for one of these people? What if you're trapped in diminisher land? Now, the best strategy is to leave the job.. But let me give you a more helpful response which is a preventative strategy.. As you go out and you are looking for the right company to work for, shop for your boss.. It is probably the biggest mistake that college graduates make as they take a job, but what you are really doing is taking a boss.. Almost like taking a spouse in some ways.. This is probably one of the most important factors of the job.. Look for someone who really appreciates your brilliance and who is going to allow you to be brilliant..

Okay.. And you say, what if I'm still stuck working for the diminisher, you aren't going to transform that person into being a multiplier, but what you can do is you can lessen that diminishing effect.. And the way to do that is very counterintuitive.. When someone is a diminisher, we want to keep him at bay, keep him out of our space, out of our hair, out of our work.. But actually, it's the people who serve as multipliers to the diminisher bosses who end up building great relationships because, what does the diminisher want? Someone that values him.. Someone who values them, someone who consults them, they want, if they are the know-it-all, what you might do is you might ask him or her for their point of view, for some help, for some guidance.. I actually have a blog that I've written for HBR, Harvard Business Review, on this subject and there are some interesting examples of people who have been multipliers up in organizations to great effect.. I think we are out of time for questions.. I want to thank you for being here and joining me in this conversation on the power of not knowing inside of our organization.. So, thank you...