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 field 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 dear 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.