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Organizational Behavior
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Organization Behavior Challenge

Fast Company is a magazine that was started by Alan Webber and Bill Taylor back in 1995. They pair were editors for the Harvard Business Review, an incredibly well respected general management magazine. *Fast Company* magazine was founded on a single premise: A global revolution was changing business, and business was changing the world. They consider themselves a progressive media brand that puts an editorial focus on innovation in technology, ethnomics (ethical economics), leadership, and design. Their blog features both original content and shared content from credible sources around the industry. First Round Review, a venture capitalist firm that provides seed-stage funding to technology companies, wrote the 2015 feature “The leadership power that comes from inexperience”.

The article is written from the perspective of Liz Wiseman, the global leader of Human Resource Development at Oracle Corporation. At the very beginning of her career, she accepted her first job out of business school with the company as a technical recruiter. Wiseman admits that she barely knew what Oracle did, but that was actually made her the best candidate for the job. She states, “My real value didn’t come from having fresh ideas. It was having no ideas at all. When you know nothing you’re forced to create something.” According to Liz, the only thing she knew to start was the importance of product knowledge transfer, but her beginner mind became her strength. Since she didn’t know anything else she exerted her only option and talked to the product managers and asked questions. This gave her a better understanding of the process and what she had to do to bring CEO Larry Ellison’s vision of Oracle University to fruition. She has achieved great success during her time at Oracle and later in her career. The article moves on

to discuss the findings of Wiseman's book *'Rookie Smarts'*, which examines over 400 different scenarios where people were new to something or not. As a millennial in the workplace, reading this article felt like striking gold because of the simple fact that most of the tasks I am given I am doing for the first time. I am the definition of a rookie. For the purpose of this organizational behavior challenge, I am going to analyze her findings through the context of our class discussions and provide commentary on what I believe to be the current and future implications of her results on my own career.

She maintains that, "When you're a rookie, you're also a pioneer. You're out there on the frontier without confidence, so you have to focus on the basics. You end up operating very lean." In my own experience, I believe this to be true. During co-op, I would make sure reach out to managers, co-workers, and other sources of information to equip myself with the best pool of knowledge because I wanted to exceed their expectations. Only after I understood the 'basics' – the context of the task, the necessary information or data, and the correct business process – did I attempt my assignment. Since I was doing the activity for the first time I was able to avoid what Wiseman describes as 'blind spots'. Once recognizes a pattern it stops innovating, thus creating a blind spot. She states that, "With time, we obviously gain knowledge, wisdom and more data points to inform our power of intuition. We build confidence and networks, but we're also creating blind spots." This causes people to stop seeking feedback and input from others, which threatens process improvement. In addition to 'blind spots', Wiseman also coins the term scar tissue. 'Scar tissue' refers to the permanent memories bad workplace experiences leave on employees.

My experience while putting together our company's quarterly board book on my last co-op was a great example of this. I was assigned a colleague to work with on this project, and asked

him how we collect the data for this report. He said that he compiled the necessary data by reaching out to correspondents from five different offices from around the world, and reconcile them against our internal headquarter data sets. However, he mentioned that they had been having issues lately because the data being captured was not standardized the different offices. This was fine when the other offices were very small in number and didn't have significant impact on cost and revenue streams. My colleague's solution was to continue to produce the old report 'taking his best guess' to fill the data gaps. Naturally this caused lots of discrepancies in reporting, so I inquired with my other co-workers. After digging in to the issue, my other co-workers pointed me in the direction of a couple new data sets that helped better combine and reconcile the necessary information for the board book. When I brought this to the attention of my colleague, he dismissed idea claiming that other data sets had come up before like that but none actually helped the process. Not wanting to let my idea go to waste, I took all of the information I gathered to the manager that assigned the project. Upon review, he exclaimed that this was in fact a big problem that he was glad had been caught at this stage, and agreed that the new data sets (the ones found through inquiry of my other co-workers) would help to account for the discrepancies.

My colleague's dismissal of my idea for process innovation stemmed from his personal 'scar tissue'. And, in fact, his desire to complete the task exactly the way he had done it before were essentially his 'blind spots'. Surprisingly, that story actually lends itself to Wiseman's next finding. Her research showed that in fields requiring specialized knowledge, inexperienced people tend to outperform their experienced peers by a small margin when the work is innovative in nature. The slight innovative aspect of the board book gave me the advantage because I was able to step back and utilize my inexperience, which led me to inquire with outside sources. Liz

contends that, “The most powerful form of learning comes when we’re desperate. When we have no choice but to learn.” In fact her discussion the learning curve perfectly fits my thoughts about the situation. My colleague (that I was assigned the project with) was a full-time employee that had been with the company for over a year. That meant to meet/exceed the expectations of my manager I had to catch up to where he was in the learning curve, after having only been with the company for less than two months. That definitely created the sense of desperation and made me uncomfortable just as Liz mentions. This is the point where I really felt that many of the points she was making about being a ‘rookie’ in an organization were true.

From there, the article pivots to a new area of her research: the perpetual rookie. The ‘perpetual rookies’ are the high-level employees that continue to utilize the power of inexperience well into their careers. This brings us to Wiseman’s concept of multipliers vs. diminishers. A multiplier is someone around whom others do their best work and the opposite is a diminisher. Liz’s findings show that common qualities to diminishers include micro-management, talking at people, and emphasizing their seniority. In contrast, multipliers support and trust others, grant autonomy and responsibility, ask questions, and are truly challenge people. Wiseman recalls the story of a Stanford master’s graduate she hired at Oracle to make her final point about multipliers. He tells the tale of his experience with a client where it was very late, and a very important deliverable was due but the team he was helping was completely stuck. Being a consultant, he was experienced with these issues, and started to sketch out solutions. After hashing out a decent starting point, he turned to the leader of the group and handed him back the pen remarking, “there’s a few ideas, why don’t you take it from there?” and the group was able to finish the project in no time doing the best work they could.

Going back to my board book example, my colleague was supposed to be my guiding senior. After reflecting upon my experience, the way he showed me the process and task we had to do was consistent with a diminisher. There were many times he would talk and give me long winded explanations about certain aspects of the project that he knew better because he was more experienced, which was his way of emphasizing his seniority. As I was still an intern, I didn't say anything about it, but it definitely turned me off to his management style and to a certain level, his authority. On the other hand the manager that assigned the project to us, was truly a multiplier. When I first brought the issue to his attention, the first thing he asked was what information led you to this observation. After walking him through my findings, he asked if I had found a solution to the problem. That was when I introduced him to the data sets that my co-workers (not the colleague on the project) had pointed me to. I mentioned that I could start to use those to fix the problem, but I am still having trouble reconciling them to match internal headquarters' data exactly. He commended me for my contribution, but then did the most important thing any multiplier can do and he handed me back the 'pen'. His approach challenged me to give him my best work, which in the end benefit him, as he was more able to more accurately report to senior executives.

For this challenge, I took a different approach because of the nature of the article and the person it was about. Liz Wiseman holds a Bachelors degree in business management and a Masters degree in organizational behavior from Brigham Young University. The article was written about the findings of her research, of an idea that was inspired by her own experience (or lack thereof). Since she is discussing her own concepts within an Organizational Behavioral context already, I thought it was best to provide my own personal commentary behind her ideas just as we would have a conversation during class time. All in all, I found this article to be

incredibly insightful. Not only was I able to conceptualize how inexperience can be leveraged as power within an organization, I was also able to reflect upon applications/instances within my own career. Because of that, I trust in what Wiseman, has to say and I also gained good advice for my career moving forward. Like I said before, as a millennial and an undergrad that is about to enter the workforce, I am the definition of a rookie. This will give me an edge at first, but I will also have to take steps toward becoming the perpetual rookie. Her advice will hopefully help me to become a multiplier, and not a diminisher, to any organization I join in the future. I also believe this is great to share with my peers as this is a tool they can leverage while on co-op, as many of us will be in the future.

Source: <http://www.fastcompany.com/3042024/hit-the-ground-running/the-leadership-power-that-comes-from-inexperience>



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