

Disrupt Yourself Podcast

EPISODE 102: LIZ WISEMAN

Welcome to the Disrupt Yourself podcast. My name is Whitney Johnson. I think, write, speak, and live all things disruption. Our guest is Liz Wiseman, the New York Times best selling author of the groundbreaking *Multipliers* and CEO and founder of the Wiseman Group.

Whitney: Welcome Liz. It is a pleasure to have you.

Liz: Oh Whitney, pleasure's all mine. You know I love talking to you about leadership, disruption, innovation, learning, you name it.

Whitney: It's really, really fun to have you here. So as you may know or may not, um, one of the things that we like to do on the podcast is the very first question is to ask you where you grew up and what you thought you wanted to be when you grew up?

Liz: Mm-hmm (affirmative). You know, I grew up in Northern California and I grew up in Silicon Valley and I knew it was a weird place uh, fr- from childhood, you know, my dad kind of tried his hand in commercial real estate and we would drive around the Bay Area and I just remember looking at the names of the building, thinking these aren't English. They were like, you know, Seismics then um, you know, all those early Intel kind of names and I'm like, "What is this place?" So I grew up in Silicon Valley and you know, my first thought of a career was that I wanted to be a lawyer, but it was because I got sued when I was 17 years old.

Whitney: What?

Liz: I did. And so I was a bit of a, a sewing prodigy as a child. So I start, I just started sewing and designing and making things as a, as a young girl. And I ended up having a job at a bridal shop, altering wedding gowns and you know, bridesmaid's gowns. And I ended up making a dress for someone who didn't like the dress and she sued me and I was 17 years old and now this is a story in and of itself that I'm sure we don't have time for. But I remember um, my dad saying to me, "Well honey, you're on your own." And she was suing me for \$200 and this was, this was all the money I had in the whole world. This was my life savings from working 'cause I started working when I was 14 years old and, and I, I was on my own, so I, you know, found a family friend who was a lawyer. I'm like, "What do I need to do?" You've never seen a young woman so prepared for court.

Like I, I had character witnesses and situation witnesses and I had like all this ready to go, which is ridiculous because you actually can't even hold a minor to a contract. And I was victorious in court but, but I just assumed it was my destiny to be a lawyer. But see, the thing is people stopped suing me so I lost interest.

Whitney: (laughs).

Liz: So that was the end of my career or my aspiration to be an attorney. But I had my day in court as they say.

Whitney: Yes. So that is fascinating. I want to go back to the sewing for just a moment because-

Liz: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Whitney: ... it's kind of a lost art these days, don't you think?

Liz: Well, it really is and um, for me, this was like my first, and it's still my, my sort of dearest, creative expression, uh, you know, sometimes people ask, you know, like, you know, I've written a number of books and people ask like, "Oh, did you want to be a writer when you were a kid?" I'm like, "No, I think I just wanted to be a creator." Like I write books because I need to create and, and when I'm not in book writing mode, I actually have to find something to do. You know, Brené Brown is the same way. Brené and I were talking about this once that, um, as soon as she's done with the book project, she starts, redecorating her house. And I'm the same thing. It's like I'm, I've been in this creative mode and I need to, I need to make stuff.

Whitney: Yeah.

Liz: I've, I've sewn a lot of things. In fact, you know, I, I actually once melted a woman's wedding gown four days before her wedding, which has been perhaps the biggest mistake I've ever made in my entire career was at 17 years old. But, um, that was a doozy.

Whitney: You melted a wedding ? How does one even melt a wedding gown?

Liz: It really stems from...I'm as impatient as I am creative. So I got this job sewing and so I felt like my job was to sew and to, you know ... so this woman had come in and she was this little bitty size six woman who had fallen in love with this size 12 wedding gown and it was, um, a discontinued gown. It couldn't be ordered and so I got assigned the alterations job and I did it and it would ... I had to completely reconstruct this gown and it, it, it was beautiful and perfect. She came in, she tried it on, was great. So that was a couple months before her wedding. She came back four days before her wedding to pick up the gown and the people in the front of the store called back to me 'cause I was like in the cave, you know, where I, I would do my sewing. And they, um, they asked if the gown was pressed and ready. I hated pressing gowns.

Whitney: (laughs).

Liz: So I was like already at 17 when I was a little bit of a prima donna I suppose. It didn't last very long, my prima donna days 'cause-

Whitney: Then you had children and you couldn't be a prima donna, could you?

Liz: Yeah. But then I melted somebody's wedding gown. But I felt like it wasn't my job to press the gowns.

Whitney: Uh.

Liz: I felt that was the, the ... Anyway, I just didn't feel like that was my job. So they said, "Hey, the gown needs to be pressed." And so I put that gown on the ironing board and I went to press it and I'm kind of one of these people who just like irons everything on high and what I, you know, I

vary is the of time. Well anyway, so I put this hot iron onto the bodice of this woman's wedding gown and I watched as it shriveled instantly 'cause this was the 80's when the ... so this is like polyester is the, the fabric du jour and it just like melted a hole through the bodice. And you know, if anyone's listening, who doesn't know what bodice is, like that's the central part. That's like covers the essentials. Yeah. And so I'm now staring at this gown, and it ... her wedding is in four days and I melted a hole in this one of a kind dress.

And I tell you, like, I think that's where I really learned how do you, how do you fix mistakes? Because there was no hiding this. There was no, like I'm not a very good liar, but there's, there's no lie that I could've come up with that would have covered this one up. And I just walked out and sai- you know, when I told her, name's Cathy, and I still love her to this day, it's like, "Cathy, um, I just melted a hole in your, in your wedding gown and it's really bad." Her eyes were getting big. And I said, "But I will fix it. I'll fix it." I said, "Come back in two days and it will be perfect." And so I then had to rebuild this dress. But like, I don't know, somehow that experience um, impressed on me, this idea of like, you know, when you screw something up, just claim it right away.

Whitney: Right. Right.

Liz: Like claim it, claim the whole thing, fix it, fix it fast and, and don't be so much of a prima donna like-

Whitney: What did she do when you said it? So when you said I'll fix it, how did she respond to you?

Liz: This, this was what was so deeply impressed on me was how she responded because for sure she should've punched me.

Whitney: (laughs).

Liz: It still blows me away that she didn't go brideszilla and scream because I really kind of deserved it. She, she kind of, she was, she looked at me, she was alarmed and then she said "you can fix it, can't you?" See and I had just a little bit of a track record with her because she knows, she knew I had taken this dress from 12 to 6 and it was, it was perfect. It was just fantastic on her. And she just said, "Tell me you can fix this." And I'm like, "You know what Cathy, I will fix this." Now I had to mind you, I'm 17, I'm a high school kid. I had to drive around to every fabric store in the South Bay trying to find fabric and lace and beading that would match this and ... but I said, "You know what, I will fix it." And then I did and was great. I mean, her confidence in me I think was a mirror of my confidence in myself that I somehow summoned in the moment.

Whitney: That's a great story. So before we move on from sewing, although I could stay here for much longer, what's the favorite thing, the thing that you're most fond of that you've sewn in your life that just made you the happiest after you've finished creating it?

Liz: Oh, well there, there is one and this was when I was maybe 16 or maybe even 15 years old. I made a tux for a guy friend of mine and it was a guy who drove me to an early morning Bible study class that I went to when I was in high school. And it came time for the prom and he didn't have enough money to buy a tux or rent a tux. I think, I think he wanted something special and it was he wanted this black crushed velvet tux with a red silk shirt with black ruffles (laughs).

Whitney: Saturday Night Fever, right?

Liz: Totally. And this is probably yeah, 1979 or 1980 and this is what he wanted and I made it for him and it looked good. It looked really good and somewhere I have a picture of that, but there's been

all sorts of things that have probably been um, more beautiful, but that's, I don't know. Somehow making that for Sid Parish really made me happy.

Whitney: Do you know why it made you happy? What, what was it about it that made you happy?

Liz: I think there's a lot of things that make you happy. One is that what you produce is closer, remotely close to what you had envisioned in your mind. Like going from, here's what I see to I actually could manifest that, that's interesting. But then seeing people happy with the product and you know, I think writing a book is no different than that in lots of ways.

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Liz: And you know, and Whitney as an author, you know this and I've heard you talk about this, it's also this, I think what brings us joy in this creative process is, is having gotten through all the things that don't go right.

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Liz: Like they don't go right, but then somehow you - kind of like the hole in that woman's dress. It's like, okay, that was not part of the plan, but then you fix it and it's as good or better. And that feels really good.

Whitney: We're going to get to your book multipliers in just a minute and I want to spend the, the, the most of our time on that. But let's talk briefly about you go to Oracle. Um, what was it like when you first started, did you ever imagine you would be a VP and how did you know it was time to leap to disrupt yourself and start a career outside of Oracle? That's a lot of questions. Take what you like. Um, but just give us a flavor of that experience.

Liz: Oh, you know what I, I took the job at Oracle thinking I was going to work there for a couple years, get some job experience and then go back to school and get a PhD. That was my plan and I ended up falling in love with this environment in this culture and you know, Oracle had a really interesting hiring strategy and what they looked for was this trifecta of talent that was, they looked for raw intelligence, achievement orientation, like freaky achievement orientation. Like I worked with all these Olympic athletes and things like that. So really smart, really driven and then sort of nice. And only sort of nice because, you know, when it came to this, this, this triangle of talent, they sometimes compromised on the nice part and so ... and they hired it, these 17 elite schools and I didn't go to one of those 17 schools so I felt like I snuck in just a little bit and it's not like I felt like I didn't belong there.

I just felt really, I felt lucky to work there. I'm like, "Well I work with all these like geniacs. It's just like such an interesting group of people. And that's where I had this first impression about, well, not all smart people cause smarts and I just was loving it and in some ways it was this wonderful meritocracy and they just like, if you are willing to say yes, they just had more and more for you to do. I went in there not ambitious at all. I didn't go in there looking for like career advancement. I just kept raising my hand and saying, "That's interesting, I'll do that." "Well, I've never done that before. Like how hard can that be?"

It's just was like, okay, you know what, that's just like a black crushed velvet tux with red ruffles that's like, I've never done it before. But how hard could it be? So I didn't realize when you do that they throw you into management, um, because you need to be generally clueless in some ways to operate in that state. And so I just got thrown into these big jobs and I remember the day they promoted me to vice president. I went home that night and I told my husband, he had a friend over at the house and, and the three of us sat and we laughed for like a half an hour and

how funny that was. Because I had never had a conversation with someone about that. They just kept giving me bigger and bigger jobs. And so I was on this really, really steep learning curve for years and it was thrilling and hard and exhilarating.

And then about 16 years into this, where every year it's like a bigger job, new job, new challenge. Suddenly I'm not underqualified anymore. Suddenly I'm not the underdog. Like I'm kind of the big boss and people come to me and they want advice. I'm like, really? I'm usually the one desperately looking for advice from other people. And honestly it felt ... I mean while some people might say, "Wow, you're finally legit." Like, that's got to feel really good. I had this great job and, and for me it was very disheartening. And um, dis-interesting perhaps might be. I don't know if I just made that word up, but it's like I didn't know what to do when I knew what to do-

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Liz: ... and until I left because I'm like, "Well." And it's not that I hadn't mastered that, but I think the steepness of the learning curve had started um, you know, to taper off and it just wasn't as interesting as it had been in the past.

Whitney: So your big idea - *Multipliers*. How did you get that idea and what is a multiplier?

Liz: Well, this, the idea came from, I mean it was part of my post Oracle therapy truly in that I was trying to make sense of this experience and I was thrown into management and so because I was thrown into management as a child, I think I was 25 year old, five years old when I got put in charge of training for the company and told to go build a university. I had to learn how to lead really fast and I watched what the people around me were doing and what I noticed is that there were a lot of really, really smart people, a lot of high IQ folks who had this knack for dumbing down their teams like - *they* were smart. Nobody around them got to be smart, but yet I knew their staff and their employees. I know those are brilliant people and you know, they all had come from top schools and things. I'm like, "How is it that a leader can end up dumbing down such an otherwise smart person? Like why is that happening?"

I, I came to call these leaders diminishers because they're smart, but they diminish the effective intelligence and ability of people around them. And fortunately, I saw other types of leaders that I came to call multipliers and they were, they were like the multipliers to the intelligence of their team. You know, these leaders were smart, but everyone around them was at their best. You know, they're leaders around whom hard problems get solved and progress is being made and people are offering their not just safe ideas but their best thinking and bold ideas and, and I would literally watch one person like, you know, I pick a colleague like Brian and I would watch Brian present in front of one leader and then I've watched Brian present in front of another. I'm like, "Wow, why is Brian kind of a shell of his real capability around this diminishing leader?"

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Liz: Brian didn't change. It's somehow it's a function of leadership and I'm left wondering about this and after Oracle, when I went sort of in search of something that I didn't yet know how to do, I started doing executive coaching and, and consulting and I found a lot of leaders who were experiencing similar challenges. They were really, really capable, but they were underutilizing their team, you know, there was latent or hidden intelligence around them. And I really think this is one of the dirty secrets of the corporate world that doesn't get discussed a lot, is that there are so many people who are, who are busy, but they're bored. You know, they're, they're overworked, but they're under underutilized. And I think it can be changed with leadership.

Whitney: So your boss, when you were 25 or early in your career, it sounds like you had one person who was a very important multiplier for you. In fact, I'm guessing there were several. Is there one that

comes to mind in particular that was pivotal in terms of really allowing you to multiply your ability?

Liz: I think there was. I was really fortunate to, to land and get some real multiplier bosses. In fact, Whitney, one of the pieces of research that uh, I want to do, maybe I'll mention it here in case someone else wants to do it and beat me to this because I really want to know the answer to this, is I'm really curious to study what are the long-term effects of somebody's first boss.

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Liz: Like I think this is kind of the boss lottery, you know, because people come out of school thinking about what job should I take and what company should I work for and what career should I pursue, and I want to just stand on a platform and yell, "Hey, hey, hey wait, don't take a job, take a boss." Like that first person or two that you go to work for who you get assigned to right out of college, or as you're new to the workforce. That person is, going to have a huge impact on your life and your career. In some ways they are going to set this watermark. So I'm, I want to study this and really try to understand that dynamic. But there was one boss in particular, um, Bob Shaffer, who was, was the one who gave me this first management job and, you know, he would just ask me to do things and then he wouldn't rescue me. Like I think that there's a real art form in, in leaders. Like I find the best leaders are comfortable watching other people be uncomfortable.

Whitney: (laughs).

Liz: Like, you know, you have to, as a leader, be able to tolerate some pain and suffering, you know, and not your own, but that of others. Just like as a good parent, you have to be able to let your children struggle on their own without doing it for them. And, and I had so many bosses like this, maybe it was 'cause I landed in this organization that was sort of like without mercy, but you know, they'd give me these big jobs and then let me figure it out. In fact, it was Bob who at one point we were at some Oracle event and it was with a lot of clients and customers and some cocktail party and Bob is introducing me to an Oracle client who was like a you know, a mature man with like gray hair, kind of looks like um, a proper executive. And he said, this is Liz. She runs Oracle University. And I'm probably 26 years old at the time. And the man does, he does a flinch, like he doesn't even hold back.

He just like a startle response. Like, "Whoa, you got a kid in charge of this operation?" And Bob said, he goes, "Oh yeah, Liz isn't particularly well qualified for her job." And then he just starts laughing inside. Like I can see his eyes twinkle. He's having a lot of fun at my expense. And, and then I had to defend myself and because I wasn't getting any executive air cover in that moment and until I said, "Well, hey Bob, who wants a job they're qualified for, you know, there'd be nothing to learn."

Whitney: Nice come back.

Liz: Well, I mean, I said the only thing I, like I said, I'm not a very good liar. I am not good at making stuff up. So I just said what was on my mind, which is like, "Hey, you know what? That's what's great about being under qualified for a job is you're learning so much." It's just better than getting a PhD. And, and in some ways it became my aspiration. Like in some ways that became my career ambition is just I don't ever have a job you're qualified for.

Whitney: Which is why you wrote the book, *Rookie Smarts*, right?

Liz: Yeah. I think in some ways it was because I, I just saw it in myself, but I saw in so many people that we tend to do our best work when we, when we know the least.

Whitney: So just a quick side note to everyone who's listening. If you buy Liz's book *Multipliers*, it's amazing. Like John Maxwell leadership guru read it and said, "I learned stuff from Liz about how I need to improve my leadership style." There is an actual appendix on page 340 called "Shopping for a New Boss." That's a checklist of what to look for in your boss. So anybody who's listening, anybody who has children who are applying for jobs, take a look at this, I think it's really powerful.

So Liz, you talk in the book about the math around multipliers. Can you walk us through that briefly before we move onto diminishers?

Liz: Here's what I found that was so startling and it really is the diminisher math is we've found that these diminishing leaders, they're really smart themselves, but they underutilize intelligence in others. And when I went to quantify this, asking people how much of your knowledge, skills, talents, you know, insight, capability, is this boss getting? We've found that these diminishing leaders on average get less than half of people's capability. So 48% is what came out of my first round of research. When we have run these numbers in schools, that number goes down to about 40%. Meaning how much of that intelligence and capability of the teachers are the principals and superintendents getting. When we do that same study in parts of the world where there's a lot of hierarchy um, you know, a lot of power distance parts of the world, Asia and Latin America and in the Middle East we find that diminishing dynamic is even deeper.

Whitney: Hmm, so-

Liz: That's the fundamental math whereas we find these multiplier leaders get virtually all of people's capability and then like a growth dividend that people say they got a hundred percent of my capability and more and more. I'm like, "And more? Like that sounds like hyperbole to me"-

Whitney: (laughs).

Liz: In fact in my first round of research, you know, there are people who gave me numbers like they got 120% of my capability. Like, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. So yeah, I truncated all that back down to 100. But then when I went back and did interviews, people were vehement about that. And like they said, "Oh well, you know, they got things from me that I didn't know I had." And, and this is probably like my natural sarcasm sort of coming to play with because I'm thinking, "Oh well, well good for you, but you already had it. It was there and you just couldn't see it." It's still 100%. People would say no, they'd got ... got things from me I didn't yet have, like I grew so much working for these leaders and, and it's why subtitled the book, you know, "How the best leaders make everyone smarter" is that people are literally growing in their intelligence and capability around these leaders. And so they become, the factor that takes people from being a fraction of their capability to getting all of their capability. And now they're, they're constantly looking to plus a group. How do I get 10% more?

Often people want to make the case for diminishers to me and, and sometimes I, I want to make the case myself. So you know, there are some people who are so smart, you know, true genius, not just like mental level genius, but like once in a lifetime kind of genius as it come on. Maybe that person's intelligence is so important to the organization that the organization can afford to have everyone else operating at you know, half-mast so to speak. But these are really, really rare. I mean, you look at the numbers, like getting 10% more across a team, just, you know, will dwarf leaders obsessing over their own intelligence, trying to get more.

Whitney: Yeah. Really powerful. Okay. So let's, let's flip it now. Um, you talk about accidental diminishers and you actually have a quiz that people can take on the website, which I took by the way. My

score was 32 and our podcast producer, Macy Robison, doesn't yet know this, but I'm gonna ask her to give me an assignment. We talk about how you can have someone on your team give you an assignment um, to help uh, remediate some of your diminisher tendencies. So what are some ways, and I'll actually share with some of mine are. And then you can maybe talk about how you might know that you're an accidental diminisher apart from taking the test. So one of mine or a few of them are always on rapid responder, rescuer and pace setter. And one of them I see, especially with my children-

Liz: Hmm.

Whitney: - pick one or so, um, just to share with people how they can potentially uh, diagnose if they're an accidental diminisher or where they are on the spectrum 'cause we all probably do it or most of us probably do it a bit.

Liz: Yeah. Here's the accidental diminisher. The accidental diminisher is the good person, good leader. The person who with the best of intentions is shutting down her team. And, and this was what was so startling in, in the research Whitney, is like when I started to research, I could clearly see these tyrannical, narcissistic bully-like diminishers and amazing multiplier leaders. But what I found that was so ... it was kind of like a plot twist when you're watching a movie, you know, when you get to that part of the movie where you realize that the good guys are actually the bad guys.

Whitney: (laughs).

Liz: This was the shocking realization. I'm like, "Wow, most of the diminishing is coming from the good guys from really well intended people." Like people who are, who sign up for management training, people who read management books, people like me who write management books and, and the diminishing dynamic, even though it comes with the best of intentions actually has as deep of a diminishing effect as kind of like the bully-like leaders. And um, you mentioned, you mentioned a couple, you've got some of the popular ones um-

Whitney: (laughs). Oh, good.

Liz: You're, you're running in the popular crowd-

Whitney: Good to know.

Liz: ... and you know, so the, the rapid responder is the, the person who's just on it. And of course this is a person who's an email doesn't last long in their inbox. You know they're kind of operating from that like "see a bear shoot a bear" kind of model. And, and what they think they're doing is that they're being of service to their team. They're keeping things moving. They don't want things you know, waiting in queue with them and they're trying to create a team that's agile and responsive. And it doesn't surprise me with your focus on disruption that you would want to be like, "Hey, we're agile, we can move." But what happens is people tend to wait for the rapid responder and you know, we all know, we all know what we do when an email note is sent to us and it's our project. It's our area of ownership and it's copied to the rapid responder and it's pretty universal what we tell ourselves.

We're like, well, I really should take action on that. But by the time I think it through, run a report, go consult with someone, this person will have already jumped on this. So I'm just gonna let him do his thing-

Whitney: Let the responder do it. Yeah.

Liz: Yeah. We just let them do it. And you know, the pace setter, these are driven achievement oriented kinds of, of leaders and, and they tend to ... they're leading by example. And Whitney, have we not been told and taught to do this for our whole lives like model the way-

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Liz: ... like I will, I will model the way for customer intimacy, for like knowledge of current events. Like whatever it is you're asking your team to do, you model it and you get out ahead of your team, but, but people rarely speed to catch up because when that gap is created, people tend to hold back. Like when we lead by setting the pace, we are more than likely to create spectators than followers. Like people are watching us do our thing.

Whitney: Interesting.

Liz: ... and then the always on, you know, these are, these are energizer bunny types, tons of energy. And of course we tell ourselves that our energy is contagious. But you know, people often find these people draining um, you know, there are often people, others don't want to want to make eye contact with (laughing). Oh no. We're gonna get, we're gonna get this person going and how do we stop? And it's like the common theme tends to be, you know, they're all virtues, all of these accidental diminisher tendencies are virtues. But when the leader embodies them to such a great degree, other people don't need to.

Whitney: Yeah. So let's talk about the last one um, in fact, let's talk about rescuer. And I think would, would be really interesting to talk about that in the context of parenting-

Liz: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Whitney: ... because I think that that's a real struggle for most parents is to rescue their children. And then what I think could be interesting and, and I don't know if you've thought about this, so maybe we can riff on it, is, um, is to ask, I want to ask you the question on how we deal with the diminisher because I think we all have had a boss that's been a diminisher, but to the extent that there are people that are listening who are parents that are rescuers, how do you deal with a parent who is a bit of a rescuer and, and start to move around that. So I'd love it if you'd just kind of riff for a minute or two on, on this idea.

Liz: Oh, you know, rescuer is one of the most common ways we see this come into play. These are big hearted leaders. They don't like to see people struggle or suffer or make mistakes or, or fail. And, and so when you see someone in that state, you're quick to rescue. Now sometimes it's a heroic, like, you know, move aside, I'm coming in to your calculus homework for you. And it's a little bit of a show off kind of rescue, but more often than not it's just extending a hand of help, but you know, what happens when we help people too early or what happens when we help people too often and you know, it, it, it might be obvious like how it creates dependency, but I think what's less obvious is the messaging that is sent because you know, like if someone were to come in and rescue me when I was doing something difficult, what essentially have they said to me?

Whitney: You can't do it. Like your dad didn't do when you got sued when you were 17 years old what a gift he gave you.

Liz: Yeah. That was just mean.

Whitney: (laughs).

Liz: I'm still bitter. No. I'm actually glad because when someone comes into rescue in saying you can't do it without me. And what was interesting is when I looked at the mindsets of these diminishing leaders and, and even these like abject diminishing leaders, their mindset was - nobody's going to figure it out without me. Which is what you're telegraphing every time you rescue, which is, you need me, you can't do this without me. I don't think you're capable. And even there's some subtext in there, is there not, that says, "I don't think you're capable of learning how to do this." Which we would never ever want to really like signal that to our kids but that's what we do when, when we rescue. Now you know th- the antidote for, for rescuing is ... the one I use is I remind myself that, now I made up the numbers on this, but I think they're probably pretty accurate. What I remind myself is that 80 to 90% of the time when people come to you looking for help asking for help, 80 to 90% of the time, they know what to do.

What they're looking for is validation, reinforcement, support, sympathy. And so I just tell myself, you know, what? Inside of their mind is an answer to this problem. And my job is to get them to articulate that and to take ownership of it. My simple work around is just remind yourself that they most likely already know how to do this. I think it will have our 80 to 90% of the situations where people don't need rescuing. They'd probably just want sympathy.

Whitney: Right. Good advice and people who work with you. Good advice with as a parent. All right, we're starting into the home stretch. Let's talk for a moment or two about how does one deal with a diminisher as, as a boss or as a parent-

Liz: Uh.

Whitney: ... what are the two or three tips that you would offer to us.

Liz: Let me offer um, the first is actually sort of an antidote to the rescuer and I think it's um, it comes into play across a number of these. Is to assert yourself and we'll go back to the parenting. Um, what happens when you try to do for a three year old with the three year old could really do for herself? Like we all know this, but what does, what does the three year old say when you try to do something for her that she can really do for herself?

Whitney: They push you away and say, they bat you away and say, "I can do this by myself."

Liz: Yeah. They just say like, "I do it. I can do this." And they don't sit you down and tell you that you're a bad parent and they don't love you. You know, they just say, "I do it, I do it daddy." And, and this is so universal. I've asked so many parents this question and it's what we need to do with well-meaning diminishing, like rescuing. You just need to say like, "You know what, I got this, hey, I appreciate the help. I will get this thing across the finish line." We need to remind people that we're capable and we'll figure it out. That will avert a lot of diminishing, particularly of the rescuer variety. And there's a bunch of defenses, defenses against the dark arts of diminishing leaders and (laughs) there's, there's a chapter in the book on this.

There's a few, there's 13 and there's too many for me to mention here, but here's what's common is that really what we should do is do the opposite of what we want to do because when someone is diminishing us micromanaging, controlling, dictating, etcetera. We tend to judge it as wrong and it is wrong and I think we actually, I think we judge it wrong on a moral level-

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Liz: ... like somebody usurping control from us, like taking away some like our, our fundamental like autonomy and agency and sense of self determination because there's such a universal reaction to diminishers and it crosses cultures, we judge it as wrong and so what do we do is we tend to hold

those people at bay. We pushed them away, we judge them. And, and like what happens when you try to keep out a micromanaging boss?

Whitney: (laughs). They micromanage more.

Liz: Yeah, they're gonna go more. What happens when you argue with a know it all?

Whitney: They know it more.

Liz: Yeah, they, they're going to double down and they tend to double down on the diminishing and it's what we always want to do is to push them away. What I find the best strategy for dealing with diminishers is invite them to the party and to let them in, to include them, to ask for their input, to tell them what they're doing, to give them your project plans and your timelines and even take it to the point where you become the multiplier to them. Sometimes the best way out of a diminishing situation was to multiply up, you know, use their native genius. Um, not let them run, you know, a sort of wild across your meetings, but like, "Hey, why don't you come to the meeting? Here's what I need from you. I'd like you to open it for the first five minutes than I'd like have the team take over and then why don't you have the final two minutes to have some closing direction." Like invite them in and direct them on how you need their help as your boss.

Whitney: Such great advice. Such great advice Liz. All right, well it's about time to wrap up. Is there any other um, story or idea that you felt like we needed to hear um, before I ask you what you're working on or what you're excited about you want to share with us?

Liz: I wanna just add a little PS to what you mentioned from John Maxwell. So John Maxwell said that this idea of Multipliers um, was a really impactful moment for him. This is someone who's, I think he's written like 30 plus leadership books and it was this idea that he was accidentally diminishing and it really struck a chord with him. He, he told me he made it his personal development goal for the next year. It was the thing he worked on in, I think it was probably 2016. But he didn't just keep it inside of his head. He talked about it with his team. He got his team together and he's like, "Okay guys, here's your job. what's my, what's my number one accidental diminisher tendency?" They're like, "Well, John is going to pick a couple of hours because you've got a bunch of them."

Whitney: (laughs).

Liz: And then he chose one and then when he got done with that, he's like, "Okay, team, what's the number two thing?" He made it a source of a group conversation and if anyone knows John, you know, he's got a wonderful sense of humor and a delightful humility about him and that's what I would encourage people to do. Like, don't take this too seriously. I think the best leaders can laugh at themselves, laugh at their diminishing tendencies, have it be a subject of public discourse on their team, get it out in the open, laugh about it because when it's out in the open, feedback's not hard. We can just say like, "Liz, you're an idea guy mode. Like, do you really want us to stop what we're doing and work on this?" Or are you just amusing yourself. "Oh, I'm just amused."

Whitney: (laughs).

Liz: Like I'm designing, you know, a, a, a tuxedo with red ruffles in my mind. Please forgive me. As you were. So I don't know. I, I think it's actually, it was the number one thing on my list of them, like 67 characteristics of leaders that was the most negatively correlated with diminishers - sense of humor.

Whitney: Interesting.

Liz: They're not funny.

Whitney: Interesting.

Liz: Now because they don't have this ability to like, laugh at themselves and go, "Oh my bad, whoops."

Whitney: Wow. Wow.

Liz: Like have a sense of humor.

Whitney: Yeah. Yeah.

Liz: Like I think managing and leading is so funny-

Whitney: (laughs).

Liz: ... and I think when people can laugh at themselves, it does a lot to um, help release capability on a team.

Whitney: Oh, love it. Okay. All right. So what are you working on that you're excited about, that you'd like to share with us Or you want people to just, you're ready to start previewing or "Hey everyone look out for x, y, or z." And where can people find you?

Liz: Well, I'm, I'm kind of gearing up to start working on a new book, but you know, I haven't, I haven't started yet, but I'll tell you the thing I'm trying to understand is I'm asking kind of a subversive question for someone who's spent the last I don't know, 15 years teaching leadership is what if leaders really aren't the secret to unlocking capability on teams and what happens if instead of training and developing and coaching the leaders, what happens if you just go directly to a team members and work on the skills and mindsets needed to be a high contributor rather than helping leaders figure out how to unlock contribution on a team.

So that's a huge study going right now. I think we've got about 1500 people in this study and we're trying to understand is there actually more impact to be had in organizations by working directly with the employees.

Whitney: With the contributors.

Liz: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Whitney: Interesting. Fascinating. [crosstalk 00:50:27].

Liz: A talent um, oriented leadership development approach.

Whitney: Yeah. Oh, very exciting. Well, I'm, I'm, I'm, I'm sure that there will be a book out for us all in the next two or three years then.

Liz: Either that I'm going to have to redecorate my house.

Whitney: (laughs). So where can people find you?

Liz: I am pretty easy to find uh, easy to find on LinkedIn. I am @lizwiseman on Twitter. Think we've got Facebook page for [Multipliers for Liz Wiseman](#) and [multipliersbooks.com](#), [rookiesmarts.com](#), and the [wisemangroup.com](#).

Whitney: Excellent. Well, Liz Wiseman, it has been so much fun to hear from you and to learn from you and I am confident that our listeners will be very much enriched and um, determined to become a better multiplier and less of an accidental diminisher. Thank you again.

Liz: My pleasure Whitney.

I've known Liz for several years, and I have to say, I was delighted to hear the stories of her sewing business as a teenager. Defending herself in a lawsuit, learning how to own up to and fix mistakes, managing the expectations of others, and understanding and learning to respect her need to create. We can learn so much about who we are and what we love when we take a moment to reflect.

This identity as someone who figured things out and identified as a creator is interesting in the context of the steep learning curve she described at Oracle. She kept saying yes and used the skills and tools she had to keep creating. It's also interesting to me how deeply she felt it when that steep learning curve tapered off. She knew she had to do something else.

And it's in the middle of those steep learning curves that we really find the gold. The leadership work she does today came from those experiences and this idea of leaders who multiply and those who diminish - whether deliberately or on accident - is such a powerful framework for leading others in our lives. It's especially important to be aware of those ways in which we are accidental diminishers.

Speaking of which, I shared in the episode that after taking the quiz, I was a rapid responder, a rescuer and a pace setter. So, our podcast manager, Macy Robison assigned me the exercise from the book of leading a conversation or a meeting where I was only allowed to ask questions. Because of my experience as a coach, this is something I'm used to doing in that setting, but not so much leading a meeting with my team. I'm working on it. And let me tell you. It is not easy!

Practical tip - Are you an accidental diminisher? It's worth taking a few minutes and [taking the quiz](#) and then going one step further and having someone assign you an exercise for your particular accidental diminisher type.

Thank you again to Liz Wiseman for being our guest, thank you to sound engineer Melissa Ruddy, manager / editor Macy Robison, content contributors Emilie Davis and Libby Newman, and art director Brandon Jameson.

I'm Whitney Johnson
And this is Disrupt Yourself.