



# turning managers into leaders

## Merge's Monthly Mega Minute – November 2008

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*Merge Gupta-Sunderji turns managers into leaders. Through engaging keynotes and facilitated workshops, she gives people specific and practical tools to achieve leadership and communication success. Contact her at [www.mergespeaks.com](http://www.mergespeaks.com) or 403-605-4756*

### How leaders overcome fear and doubts

Earlier this year, I went scuba diving for the very first time. For those of you who know me well, you know that this was a big step for me. You see, less than three years ago, I could not swim. Less than three years ago, I was deathly afraid of being in any place where my head was under water or my feet could not touch the ground. Since then (and many swimming lessons later), I have overcome my fears and mastered the basic water movement skills that so many take for granted. But back to the scuba diving story ... here I was, 45 feet beneath the ocean's surface, following my instructor, and experiencing an underwater world that previously I had only seen in pictures or in film! It was incredible!

My first-time diving experience may have had a magnificent ending, but it didn't start out that way! When I first went down the safety line with Holly (my instructor), equalizing the pressure every few feet, I was fairly confident and found the first 20 feet to be quite easy. But then, as I continued to descend and the natural light faded, increasing murkiness brought back old fears and insecurities. By the time I got to the ocean floor, I had begun to hyperventilate. Holly quickly wrote on her underwater clipboard – "SINGLE FOCUS" – to remind me of a conversation we'd had earlier that day, while we were still on *terra firma*. Over coffee and muffins that morning, we talked about excellence in leadership and she asked me what I say to leaders who express doubt about any aspect of their leadership role. "Easy," I answered. "I tell them to conquer their fear by focusing on one task at a time. By keeping a single focus, whether it's having one conversation, doing one step in a complex process, or dealing with a single problem, you can overcome your fear by staying focused on single task. One step at a time, you will accomplish your overall goal." She tapped my arm, and beneath the words "SINGLE FOCUS", she added "BREATHE." For the next five minutes, we focused exclusively on getting my breathing down to a regular rhythmic pace. And then, the following 45 minutes were spectacular! If you have fears and doubts, you CAN overcome them by focusing on a single task. I'm living proof!