



turning managers into leaders

Merge's Monthly Mega Minute – December 2011

Welcome to **Merge's Monthly Mega-Minute** - a bite-sized, yet substantial and practical, nugget of information that you can use immediately to enhance your professional and personal success.

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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 or 403-605-4756

Don't be a strangler fig!

Strangler figs are a common species in the rainforest ecosystem and I saw them up-close during a recent visit to Cairns, Australia. These are tall canopy trees that start life in an unusual way. Tiny sticky seeds are deposited high in trees through bird pollination and they germinate as epiphytes on the tree branches. Initially, the seedlings get their nutrients from the sun and rain high up in the canopy, but soon they start sending out numerous thin roots down the tree trunk. When these roots reach the ground, they dig in and begin to grow quickly, competing with the host tree for water and nutrients. The roots start to encircle the trunk and fuse together, and as they grow thicker, they tighten and cut off the host tree's flow of nutrients. At the same time up top, the strangler fig puts out leaves that overtake the tree and rob it of sunlight. Eventually, the host dies from strangulation and insufficient sunlight. In the end, the strangler fig stands on its own, a hollow central core being the only reminder of the original host. "Not bad for something that started off as a mere stray seed carried in bird droppings!" you might think. Except for one thing – because the central trunk of the strangler fig is hollow, it is very easy for a passing woodcutter to chop the tree down. And many do.

An apt metaphor for what can happen in the workplace when a new supervisor joins an existing team. Usually appointed by a senior leader, the new manager often has innovative ideas and fresh energy and can't wait to get going, to make changes and create new opportunities. Which is great ... but not if progress is made through force and intimidation, instead of through agreement and consensus. Both methods will achieve success in the short-term, but in the long-term is where the differences will be patently obvious. Growth and success that comes from pressure and coercion will have a hollow core, and just like the strangler fig, a tree with a hollow core is much easier to cut down. Far more effective to grow the tree through agreement and consensus, because a solid trunk can withstand the

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woodcutter's machete much more effectively. Worth keeping in mind when you step into a new leadership role.