HOW TO BE 10x IN THE TALENT ECONOMY

GAME CHANGER

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*This book is dedicated to our wives, Jenny Solomon
and Isabel Blumberg, and our children, Alec Blumberg,
Lucy Solomon, Luke Blumberg, and Rainen Solomon.*

FOREWORD

When we first conceived of this book in late 2018, it was because we knew that rapid advances in technology had radically transformed working life in a way that not everybody was acclimating to at the same rate. As managers of top tech talent, we wanted to create a book that would help educate readers of all stripes.

Little did we know as we finished this manuscript and handed it in to our publisher for final edits in preparation for a fall 2020 release that the world that we thought had changed drastically was about to show us what real drastic change is.

The stories in this book and the lessons we convey are no less important now than they were a year ago, but one major element has changed. Though we talk about it a fair amount in the book, this one change necessitates that we write this "Foreword" now—remote work.

Among the big items we knew we had to share was the usefulness and, in fact, the necessity of remote work. We believed and still believe that the ability to solve big problems remotely is one of the twenty-first century's greatest gifts.

Little did we know that the onslaught of COVID-19 would soon expose how unprepared the world is for remote work on a grand scale. The ability of companies and governments, small and large, to swiftly and efficiently deploy remote working capabilities on a global scale is now essential. Moreover, remote work is no longer just a preference for top 10x tech

talent. As we have learned, it can be a matter of life and death, success and failure, for everyone.

So, as you read this book, keep the concept of remote work close to the forefront of your mind. It, and the other lessons in this book, are the new normal.

As we write this "Foreword," Rishon is in Miami with his two sons, while his wife is working on the frontlines in New York City taking care of patients—seeing some for the first time now via telemedicine. In both cities, all restaurants are closed except for take-out. In Miami, beaches, and all the other things that make Miami a thriving and wonderful outdoor metropolis, are shut down.

Nonetheless, the two of us in Miami and Montclair, New Jersey, our wonderful 10x team from upstate New York, Brooklyn, Queens, and Manhattan, and the amazing 10x talent we represent hailing from all places near and far are all still hard at work. Sure, we've had to add a few more cloud-based tools to our arsenal to make things run more smoothly, but business carries on. Thankfully, we were well prepared to work remotely, and we are all adjusting to this period of social distancing.

This is our new world. And it is quite different from the world we lived in just a few weeks ago. Things will return to normal, or at least a new normal, and when they do, we will all be better prepared.

In the meantime, we hope you, your families, and your teams are safe and healthy.

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Rishon Blumberg and Michael Solomon
March 2020

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INTRO OUTRO

WHAT WE MEAN
WHEN WE SAY "10x"

WE LIVE IN A 10x WORLD

Welcome to the era of 10x talent, where businesses and governments, large and small, are only as good as their very best players.

Today, the exceptionally talented matter more than ever—and they know it.

They have changed the game for all time.

With the rapid digitization of every conceivable product and service— in fact, virtually every human action and interaction—the environment has transformed so fast that nearly everyone you deal with has to be phenomenally gifted and ready and willing to work for you.

Turning back is not an option. The 10xers are at the wheel.

So, what do we mean, exactly, when we call someone a 10x talent?

First and foremost, in our experience, we're referring to the world's most sought-after programmers and coding artists, but the 10x concepts we cover in this book will resonate with anyone who cares about exponential self-improvement for themselves or their organization. To be 10x is to

be more than great, to deliver more than ten times the expectations. A 10xer is equal parts high IQ and high EQ (emotional quotient; empathy, the ability to recognize and respond to the emotions of oneself and others). A 10xer is in a constant state of evolution and improvement, fueled by curiosity, ambition, and an insatiable desire to do more and do it better. A 10xer is there to tackle your thorniest problems, improve your strongest assets, and cut a path to success.

It's important to note that 10xers come in all shapes, sizes, genders, races, nationalities, sexual orientations, and ages. (We opted to use binary gender pronouns throughout this book for simplicity, but anyone, no matter how they define themselves, can be 10x.)

Whatever your venture, you're going to need as many 10xers as you can get.

> The future is already here—it's just not evenly distributed.
> —WILLIAM GIBSON, 2003

Over the coming decades, as machines replicate more and more physical and intellectual processes, the need for live humans to deliver exponentially beyond expectation is going to increase. It won't be good enough to be good. Good will be easily replaced by algorithms and robots. You're going to need to align with the truly outstanding and, for most of us, that will require a reinvention of mindset. If you're not striving to become a game changer or your company isn't upping its game, the automated future will pass you by.

That's where this book comes in.

From where we stand, the 10x revolution is already well underway.

To even the most casual observer, it's easy to see that traditional work roles are going, going, gone. Old, entrenched hierarchies, hiring practices, production modes, and managerial styles all face imminent extinction. True,

10xers in the tech sphere have been the first to create and embrace this radical paradigm shift, but the big changes are moving like a wildfire through every sector. The old model employee accepted the role of a cog in the machine. Today, 10x talent knows the machine can't work without them, and this one switch fundamentally differentiates the old workplace from the new. Now 10x talent knows that it's on you to get with *their* program.

Tech and digitization have disrupted the very foundation of all ventures, business, government, or otherwise and in so doing have handed over the controls to those who have the exceptional skills to provide efficiency and meaningful growth. The top six companies as measured by market cap are tech companies, and all of the four US companies that have reached trillion-dollar market caps are tech companies. Nine of the twenty richest people in the world today made their money in technology. And the rest of us, for better or worse, work in tech right alongside them. Whether you are a W2 (full-time or part-time employee) or a 1099 (freelance contractor), whatever your industry, whatever your field, you are now living under the early effects of this game-changing 10x revolution.

THE 10x DIFFERENCE

Excellence is being able to perform at a high level over and over again. You can hit a half-court shot once. That's just the luck of the draw. If you consistently do it, that's excellence.
—JAY-Z, 2011

Game Changer is about the dual impact that technology and the people who create it are having on the way companies and governments must approach their greatest asset, their talent. Together, we will uncover the secrets behind 10x performance in any industry, because the ability to attract, hire, and retain 10x talent is a game changer for any company, large or small.

In fact, 10x performance is what you require just to stay in the game.

How literally do we mean that? Here's a real story from the front lines, more typical than you'd imagine.

We were approached last year by a successful, tech-based, nonprofit founder. Let's call her Nicole. She had a technical background, but had long since moved out of that role. Nicole knew we managed the kind of top-level coders who could rebuild her company's product. Since 2011, we've built a reputation for finding, vetting, and matching the finest contract tech talent with companies large and small, everyone from Verizon, eBay, BMW, and Amex to MIT, Vice, and even the federal government.

Nicole confided in us: She knew her thirty-six-member team was simply not delivering the way she needed. We told her we had just the right 10xer for the job and showed her the one person we thought was best suited to lead the project, as well as a couple more developers who could provide the speed and capacity required to turn the company around with finesse.

Nicole liked what she saw—she told us to sit tight for a couple weeks and to not mention our conversation to anyone.

Two weeks later, Nicole returned to our office with the news that she had let go of no less than thirty-three of her thirty-six-person team. *More than 90 percent*. She was sorry to lay off that many fine workers and was quick to mention that they were well taken care of, but there was no way around this one simple fact: Our three recommended 10xers could deliver a better, stronger, more sustainable product than thirty-three or even a hundred engineers who were just "very good."

This is only one story among hundreds, but it neatly demonstrates the true power of 10x in a concrete fashion. Within six months, Nicole's platform was rebuilt with modern everything, as fast at processing transactions as Amazon.com and loaded with new and long-desired features, and Nicole had a new, robust wave of growth on her hands.

Lesson One: In the new talent economy, everybody you deal with better be 10x, or at least striving to be.

EMBRACE 10x OR GET LEFT BEHIND

The game has already changed, but not everyone has acclimated with the same speed or grace. As obvious as the basic fact of the 10x revolution is for us, it has been harder for some to internalize, especially those people working with older, larger entities mired in outmoded policies, bureaucracy, and stagnating cultural standards.

Another true story—the names have been changed but nobody's innocent.

Picture two companies—make that two *desperate* companies: an education start-up and a mid-sized pharmaceutical outfit. They both urgently needed a truly gifted coder to step in and rethink the complex technical elements of their businesses from the ground up, so they reached out to us. After some consideration, we brought forward Jake, one of our very best clients.

Jake was a seasoned developer who exemplified the concept of 10x, delivering value way beyond promises on a regular basis. He knew what he wanted, and it wasn't a full-time W2 job. Jake wanted to work remotely 70 percent of the time. He wanted to give input on the big decisions regarding every build, and he wanted the kind of hourly rate he had become accustomed to as a company-saving, top-shelf programmer. Most of all, Jake knew he was in demand. Every week, we received inquiries for him.

The pharma company, with offices worldwide, balked at Jake's requests. Why couldn't he just be grateful for a real job offer from a solid firm? Why wasn't he overjoyed to take his assigned role in the chain of command? The hiring powers could not understand what Jake was after and, when pressed, they weren't prepared to give him what he wanted. It's a core frustration we deal with on a weekly basis—not everybody gets it.

During the negotiation for Jake's contract, we made our best efforts to convince them of the value Jake would bring to the table, but they simply refused to break with their entrenched employment ideas. In a painful act

of self-sabotage, they utterly failed to realize that we are living through a giant sociocultural shift, where the talent has the leverage.

We had better luck convincing the education start-up about Jake. They took him on and accepted his terms because they were on his wavelength; they grasped Jake's cultural orientation and lifestyle choices. They knew he was a true 10xer, which means they understood what kind of growth Jake could bring them.

Today, the pharma firm in question seems to be in a downward spiral—the last of their prior sheen has all but disappeared. Meanwhile, the ed tech start-up that hired Jake has become a market leader in their field. Jake is still one of their regular on-again/off-again consultants, and they know their big, company-wide advances are directly related to the rare level of excellence he and other 10xers like him can provide.

What the losing company had to learn the hard way was this: To attract, motivate, and retain talent in the new workplace, a deeper understanding of the game-changing 10x revolution is now essential.

THE NEED FOR 10x-LEVEL MANAGEMENT

It should be obvious that the world is now tech-dominated, and that puts 10x talent in the driver's seat. What has not yet been absorbed by the powers that be is this: Where there is 10x talent, there is a growing need for a new style of 10x-level management.

Game Changer aims to help redefine the very concepts of talent and management for our new 10x-run world. Through tales from the trenches, we'll explore how the relationship between talent and its proper management is a symbiotic force that can exponentially ensure the greatest chances for sustainable success for all ventures, large and small, public and private. As we will demonstrate, 10x-level management comes in many forms, but it always brings a separate, seasoned point of view, and the ability to see around corners, delivering a critical advantage in an increasingly

volatile marketplace. 10x-level management also knows how to spot the instinct for success or sabotage in all prospective clients.

In *Game Changer*, we'll explore a variety of reasons the interplay between talent and management is vital to all of today's workers, no matter their field. Wherever and however you earn your daily bread, office or remote, full-time or part-time, you can frame your job as talent. But in order to become a 10x talent, you must understand how and why strong managerial guidance is essential.

Perhaps the best argument for a rethink of the talent-management relationship is the most obvious one: In your life, you will likely spend an estimated 40 percent of your precious time at work. For better or worse, the talent-management relationship is now one of your closest *personal* relationships, and it has the power to affect your life as deeply as any other.

OUR STORY

> Talent is God given. Be humble. Fame is man-given.
> Be grateful. Conceit is self-given. Be careful.
> —JOHN WOODEN, 1972

Why listen to us? Our breadth of talent management experience grew from a very unusual set of circumstances that nobody could have planned.

In the beginning, we were managers within the music business in the classic mode, and we were quite successful. Our clients included John Mayer, Vanessa Carlton, and other heralded artists. They had hit records, did international tours, won Grammys, and achieved everything a music artist can dream of. We had achieved our dreams, too. Then, without warning, the music industry imploded.

It was not lost on us that technology was the force wreaking havoc on our world.

We knew *we* had to change to thrive, and so we applied our talent management expertise to the tech world, tentatively at first. The results were spectacular, sometimes mind-boggling, and consistently educational. In the first five years, we managed everyone from Google/Apple/Facebook alums to Ivy Leaguers with multiple advanced degrees and veterans of every tech company at the highest level.

It's important to point out that neither of us had a lick of programming experience ourselves. In fact, you probably couldn't have picked two less tech-ready interlopers. We were city kids—byproducts of the hustle-mad New York City of the 1970s. Our paths first crossed at a small Jewish day school in Manhattan. And like many young boys of our generation, we were wildly passionate about music—reading all the liner notes on the LPs, knowing every credit, getting the story behind the story. We went our separate ways after eighth grade—Rishon to the Westside, Michael to the Eastside—but the friendship remained strong through high school. We saw something in each other—the willingness to dream big.

Early on, we both got to view the entertainment business from different angles. Rishon had a close family friend, Dave Hahn, who managed the punk group the Bad Brains. Michael dated Kristen Carr, whose mother Barbara was Bruce Springsteen's co-manager and whose stepfather Dave Marsh is a noted rock critic, historian, and now radio personality. Neither of us knew what we wanted to do exactly, but we knew this: We both had a crazy hunger to build something, to be in the center of things, to *make it happen*.

We jumped at every imaginable endeavor, legal and illegal—everything from the proverbial lemonade stand to fake ID businesses to promoting keg parties in high school. We plotted and schemed, learned the angles: We'd find guys in the city to rent a loft, then we'd strike a deal with the beer distributor and promote the party around to all the private schools and charge to get in—five bucks, ten bucks, whatever the traffic would allow. Some of our early partners in crime have gone on to become successful club owners and restaurateurs.

With each new success or flop, every dicey new endeavor, our hunger grew. We started a T-shirt business, printing them up and distributing them

through the NYU dorms. Then, the movie *The Color of Money* came out and we thought, *Why not start our own pool hall*? We raised four hundred grand and scouted a dozen locations—we even considered the notorious, defunct sex club Plato's Retreat in the basement of the Ansonia. The deal fell through—a blessing in disguise—but we kept rolling. Rishon left the city to go to Wharton, the business school at the University of Pennsylvania, and ended up running the concert committee there for three years. Michael went to the University of Connecticut and Baruch College, where he became president of the American Marketing Association. But for both of us, college was the backup plan. We wanted to be where the action was.

In particular, Michael's experiences watching and working with Bruce Springsteen's management team opened our minds to the power of talent management, all that it can be. The relationship between Bruce and his managers had been going strong for almost two decades when we came along. It was a well-oiled machine. The lifestyles of all involved—not just Bruce and the musicians and the managers but the crew and everyone else—were like nothing we'd ever seen anywhere. It wasn't just about the money, the power, the privilege, the comforts of affluence. It was about the *family sense*—the deep mutual respect and gratitude. These were people who were incredibly articulate and not afraid to challenge and help one another. Bruce and his team weren't Us Against the World. They were Us *With* the World.

What we didn't know at the time was that we were beginning our real education in the power of 10x. You might even say Bruce was the first 10xer we saw up close. And the lessons we learned would prove invaluable when we dared to enter the tech landscape.

PLAY FOR KEEPS

In *Game Changer*, we'll juxtapose the worlds of entertainment, tech, megacorporations, start-ups, nonprofits, government, and high finance to

reveal how trends are spreading across industries and professions. We'll deliver durable skills and perspectives that anyone who touches the talent economy can apply. And we'll bring firsthand testimony from some real-life Game Changers, everyone from start-up mavens and top show-biz players to blockchain experts, Silicon Valley swashbucklers, and others to whom we've had access from our unique vantage point as tech talent managers.

Our core discoveries may surprise you. Here are just a few in shorthand:

With automation eating up more and more jobs that involve predictable repetition, the new workplace is not a place at all, but a state of workflow that requires far greater flexibility for all parties involved, including openness to third party feedback, group efforts, greater horizontality, greater freedom for the 10xer, and openness to differing generational attitudes.

In the new and utterly revamped work world, tech 10xers control the heart and soul of all businesses, governments, and ventures of every stripe. Don't underestimate their influence.

Great talent becomes 10x when it develops the quality of *manageability*—the ability to seek out and internalize powerful outside guidance, built on an insatiable desire for growth and improvement.

10x managers understand that all talents live on a continuum between Success and Sabotage Impulses—the internal tendency to make positive choices that steer them toward their goals at one end and a denial-based cycle that inadvertently destroys chances for success at the other. The 10x manager knows how to identify the strains and act accordingly.

10x managers must also provide two kinds of Super Vision—Inner Vision, the ability to catch and expose a talent's blind spots and develop strategies to overcome them, and Future Vision, the ability to help talent see around corners.

Not only do all key members of the team need to be 10x and perceive themselves as talents, key members need to also learn how to become strong talent managers themselves, through active practice.

This makes for a Double-Hat World, where talent and management roles switch depending on setting and situation. To cite one simple

example, consider a lean start-up where one moment a CTO is writing code and, the next, is managing the team. That flexibility shapes the new world.

Becoming adept at wearing both hats is the surest shot at success in this volatile new work terrain.

Most of all, the talent-management axis requires high EQ, empathy, and the ability to always work with *all* aspects of a talent's life and personality. These strengths always mattered—today, they are nonnegotiable.

This book is divided into two main sections. In the first half, we approach things from the manager's side, exploring all the ways you can attract, develop, and keep 10x talent and make your company itself more 10x. In the second half, we see things from the talent's POV and show how the roles of manager and talent are inextricably linked.

Most important, every step of the way, there are stories and lessons about how you can become 10x yourself. Whether you're a mid- to high-level manager, a CEO, entrepreneur, or a secondary audience of those talents seeking work in the diverse terrain of the modern office, this book will bring you a fresh way of seeing things, as well as practical strategies for success. We have lessons for readers on the tech frontier, but also for anyone interested in the future of work and the nature of success. We have useful advice for those seeking to improve their own path, as well as for those currently involved with STEM both domestically and abroad. On the larger scale, our lessons can help to provide a roadmap for companies, non-profits, and governments around the globe who want to understand what tactics are required to employ and retain 10xers. And for the individual, we aim to expose aspiring 10xers to the many nuances they'll need to master in order to thrive in an increasingly unfamiliar working world.

Wherever you stand, the game has changed. If you want to be competitive as an entity or as an individual, read on.

GAME
CHANGER

PART ONE

How to Become a 10x Company and Attract 10x Talent

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

UNDERSTANDING THE 10xer

We shape our tools and then our tools shape us.
—MARSHALL MCLUHAN, 1967

W e've told you about how much you need 10xers.

Now we're going to tell you what *they* need.

But before we do, it's important to first understand the terrain. The transformations that 10x tech talent and the new generation of which they are a part have brought to the contemporary workplace are radical and wide-sweeping. They are literally changing the game. We aren't just talking about a mere aesthetic trend or a lateral shift in work processes. This is, in every sense, a revolution. Whoever you are, whatever your gig, the big changes are going to reach you.

It's no accident that the 10x revolution got its first sparks as the curtain dropped on one of America's most tumultuous decades, the 1960s. Upheaval was in the air. In '69, the Stanford Research Institute became one of the four nodes of ARPANET, the government research project that would grow into what we now think of as the internet. The very next year, Xerox opened a Palo Alto-based lab that would go on to create ethernet

computing and the graphical user interface. One year later, journalist Don Hoefler titled a three-part report on the semiconductor industry "Silicon Valley, U.S.A." and a new state of mind was born.[1]

The ten years that followed Hoefler's essay make up the decade when most Boomers and children of the '60s got their first taste of grown-up life. In the newly christened Silicon Valley, companies like Atari, Apple, and Oracle all reflected this veer toward the youthful, breeding a unique combo of counterculture ideals, cutting-edge scientific drive, daring technological invention, and strangely enough, the spirit of *fun*—a mix that nobody could have predicted. In hindsight, it's easy to see why the Bay Area, with its long-standing Bohemian tradition and rich academic culture, became the petri dish in which old work modes could not only be mended, they could be countered, ignored, dismantled, and destroyed. The Silicon Valley pioneers were, on the whole, neither business titans whose main motive was profit, nor were they power-hungry builders, driven to see their names across giant monoliths. They weren't even cultural movers and shakers in the usual sense. These were computer geeks— and geeks love doing what they do because *they love doing it*. This key distinction provided the nucleus for a new, interconnected, cooperative, game-loving, data-driven, risk-loving, failure-embracing, fast-minded culture. While nobody was looking, a new breed of talent was born—10xers were coming of age and ready to change everything.

There in the new digital Mecca, far from Port Authority and the traditional pressures of Wall Street, D. C., and the proverbial "home office," the start-up culture was able to gestate outside the public eye with double-speed, giving birth to Cisco ('84), eBay ('95), PayPal ('98), Google ('98), Tesla ('03), Facebook ('04), Uber ('09), and so many more. What's important to understand is that this wasn't *just* a technological renaissance—it was simultaneously a cataclysmic shift in work style and a total attitudinal reset. The acceleration in invention couldn't have happened without a robust disregard for old-fashioned bureaucracies, the norms that used to hold businesses in place. As they digitized the world,

Silicon Valley visionaries also introduced calculated disruption, evidence-based data testing, efficiency adjustments, and, most of all, *a culture of interconnectedness*—advances that have quickly seeped into the broader marketplace.

It's important to acknowledge that technology companies are now taking a beating for everything from fake news to privacy concerns to screen addiction.[2] However, the advances these companies made in working smarter are not in question.

In the beginning, these new work modes barely hung together in what was then uncharted territory. Today, the Silicon Valley way of doing things is a true culture, with its own set of standards and practices. As Steven John, strategic chief information officer of Workday, recently put it: "Silicon Valley is like Tasmania or Madagascar. It's developed different life-forms than anywhere else."[3]

The changes are as deep as they are widespread. In a recent study conducted by Accenture, a multinational company dedicated to the exploration of what they call "market-shaping AI and self-optimizing systems," top researchers looked into what really makes Silicon Valley tick.[4] They identified five unique features of the business culture there that stand apart from its counterparts elsewhere. 1) Silicon Valley is "laid back—but ready for action," with an accent on getting things done quickly rather than agonizing over minutiae. 2) SV players are "committed yet independent," as fiercely loyal to their team as to their employer. 3) This deeply ingrained sense of independence and interdependence leads to an atmosphere that is at once competitive *and* cooperative. It's a unique balance that people from far flung worlds like cutthroat Wall Street or altruistic nonprofits might have trouble understanding. It's "all for one and one for all" but it's also "give me my space." 4) SV employees tend to be both pragmatic and optimistic. And finally, 5) although they are extrinsically motivated, they are *intrinsically fulfilled*. In other words, they see intellectual stimulation, innovation, and problem-solving as their greatest sources of, you guessed it, fun.

Pondering this strange mix, one key stat jumped out at us: 41.6 percent of Silicon Valley engineers contribute to open source code that can be used by anyone for free. If you are not familiar with this concept, open source languages, frameworks, and libraries are ways that software engineers share their work, so that elements can be used over and over by anyone with access to a computer, at absolutely no cost. At the core of this idea is camaraderie and efficiency over money. These mavens would rather donate work for the benefit of saving one another time than get paid for that time. Imagine people in any other industry being willing to share at that level! Even for computer programmers, this figure is more than twice the national average. It's as if Silicon Valley has created a practice of forward-motion cooperation that can be likened to a football team coordinating efforts to get down the field—but all without ever formally defining themselves as a team.

Like we said, they do it because *they love the doing of it*—it's the most important thing you can know about 10xers.

REVOLUTION COAST TO COAST

Today, everyone is feeling the heat from fires those first tech entrepreneurs started. Faster than anyone thought possible, new ways of working have begun to seep into corporate America, with adjustments large and small, ranging from perks like free lunch and snacks to amenities, gyms, coaches, ping pong tables, nap pods, equity, 360 feedback, company retreats, input from everyone, team-building events, meditation rooms, lean start-ups, "move fast or die," the four-hour workweek, acqui-hires, innovator's dilemmas, failing fast, iterating, pivoting, being mission-driven, being data-driven, and much more.

The old-style work culture is toast.

In a May 31, 2019, *Forbes* piece titled "Why Corporate America Finally Embraced Silicon Valley,"[5] Nish Acharya writes that "the realization that

start-ups, university researchers, and crowd-sourced solutions can solve certain problems more quickly and cheaply than in-house experts has . . . led a growing number of corporations to adopt open innovation principles." In other words, the very principles that were once exclusive to Silicon Valley. Even behemoths like GM are realizing that the implementation of new technologies cannot only be realized by partnerships with outside start-ups. They're also going to have to deploy new Silicon Valley-style skills training for their staple in-house employees. It's as if David is teaching Goliath how to use the slingshot.

From the outside, some of the aforementioned inventions of the Silicon Valley workplace may look like a soft facade—niceties to make a day at the office seem less grueling. But, in fact, most of these inventions are the by-products of hard data. Placing a nap pod in an office space isn't a lark to grab headlines—it's a move made by smart management who read the extensive research that correlates rest and productivity. Science and those who apply it are driving the game change.

The big companies are taking notes. Some have been plundering the Silicon Valley innovative style by any or all of the following means:

1. Internal Venture Arms, staffed and modeled after independent Venture Capital firms (VC's.)
2. Lab or innovation departments mandated with innovating for the future.
3. Acqui-hiring (also known as Acq-hiring), whereby a company is purchased primarily to recruit its employees rather than its products or services.
4. Partnering with start-ups to foster innovation.
5. Partnering with incubators and accelerators to do the same.

In that same *Forbes* article, John Sculley, infamous former CEO of Apple, emphasizes what he believes are the two basic gifts of Silicon Valley culture: the emphasis on engineering *tools*, in other words, objects that are

designed to improve living, and the importance of small teams to achieve "rapid, breakthrough results." Make no mistake, the teams he's talking about are populated with 10xers, and the way they work hard is directly counter to the way many of us think of hard work. What used to be the very image of the serious employee—showing up, putting in long hours, submission to an entrenched hierarchy—is in the process of being utterly revamped.

And the real reason it's being revamped?

So that the 10xers can do what they do best.

SMART FLOW

The first thing 10xers need for you to know is that they are not your every-day employee.

By definition, the 10xer is that rare person with outsized skills, an abnormally positive attitude, and lots of vision, balanced with enough humility to pivot when great advice comes along. When great advice doesn't come organically, the 10xer solicits it, knowing where and how to look for feedback that will help most. Deep curiosity and enthusiasm are always part of the 10xer's game-changing makeup. 10xers often work harder and smarter than everyone else in the room. From their perspective, inefficiency is just a bug they'd love to squash. They see a world filled with opportunities and can move on to the next available one when things don't go their way. They are fundamentally reasonable and willing to accept responsibility for their role in outcomes. In essence, the 10xer alone has the raw materials to go from very good to great to excellent to sublime and beyond.

But they may not operate the way you think they should.

Aaron Sylvan, a CTO-level 10xer who has overseen the creation of many start-ups and raised millions of dollars in funding, says, "Real jobs don't work like homework; the boss can't always control the difficulty." To

properly manage a 10x talent, the key is creating a space for them to work smart, on their terms. The real 10xers will solve your problems. Your job is to make the problems clear to them, make sure they have the space, time, and resources to solve them, and then *get out of the way*.

Cal Newport, author and associate professor of computer science at Georgetown University, has coined the term "deep work," which he describes as "professional activities performed in a state of distraction-free concentration that push your cognitive capabilities to their limit." In other words, the kind of work that only 10xers can handle.[6]

With a PhD from MIT, five books to his name, and a gaggle of academic papers and blogs under his belt, Newport knows a thing or two about productivity. (For the record, he's married with two kids and almost never works on weekends.) Newport defines "deep work" as those activities that can "create new value, improve your skills, and are hard to replicate."

What's important to note about Newport's discovery is that it has a grim counterpart, which he calls "shallow work," activities that are not cognitively demanding. This deceptively simple discovery offers what we think might be the starkest lesson for those who balk at the very idea of 10xers: On the whole, Professor Newport notes that shallow work activities "tend not to create new value in the world and are easy to replicate." In other words, if you don't go deep, even work executed by relatively smart, skilled labor won't get you where you need to go.

For those in the know, 10x tech talent are frequently nocturnal creatures and often do their best work, their "deep work," in the wee hours. That's why flexible work hours and work location are important to the 10xer.

Newport's work mirrors what psychologists have long called "the flow state," a term first coined by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in 1975 to describe a mental state in which the participant is fully immersed in the act of problem-solving. Along with Jeanne Nakamura, Csíkszentmihalyi defined the following characteristics that make up a powerful mind flow: intense and focused concentration in the present; merging of action and awareness; loss of self-consciousness; a sense of personal control; the distortion

of one's subjective experience of time; and last but perhaps most important, a sense that the activity is rewarding.

In a recent CNN Business article titled "These employers don't care where or when you work,"[7] writer Kathryn Vasel explores ROWE, a new company modus operandi that stands for Results Only Work Environment. In a nutshell, ROWE "gives workers complete autonomy, but to be successful, workers need to have clear and detailed goals and metrics." In other words—work anywhere, anytime. Just get the job done right. It's a basic day-to-day policy we've always held here at 10x Management without knowing there was a name for it. As Vasel points out, ascribing to ROWE can be a company-wide management challenge. "It means giving up the deeply ingrained notion that the best employees are the ones who are always at their desks."

Jason Rubenstein, currently CTO of Table.Co and a Python / DevOps maven who has worked as both talent and manager, understands the need for this game-changing freedom. He says he knows a 10xer when he sees one. "They have the personal discipline to sit down and get the work done, *it's a joy to them*. Plus, they always have a subjective level of professional integrity to match their technical ability. I know I can trust them both technically and personally."

A former Google engineer who started programming at age ten by teaching himself FORTRAN at his grade school's lone IBM terminal, Rubenstein has experienced the schism between the old world and the new firsthand. "In the old culture, everyone wanted you in a meeting. And every time you tried to launch a new initiative that involved using remote talent, it was, 'We don't do those things. We *hire* people.' Even now, if I'm working with larger companies, a big part of my job is explaining how the best 10xers work and managing expectations. Some of those companies are *still* so stuck in the old world bottle, I'm talking a 1950s, '60s, '70s model, where you have a CEO completely freaking out, micromanaging the crap out of everyone."

On the frontlines here at 10x Management, we also experience these old world / new world tensions on a daily basis. We can share more stories

than we'd like about top-level remote talent who were passed on by the very companies that needed them most, all because these companies held onto the distorted belief that, if they don't see the work being performed in their office, then it's as if it's not happening at all.

As Rubenstein puts it, "They want butts in seats, or at least that's what they *think* they want. What they really want is quality work and real value for their money. Well, how do you define value? It's on us to educate them."

The education process is not always easy and has even been known to backfire. We recently spoke with one prominent manager at a major US bank who told us his board is now reeling back a policy that formerly allowed select top programmers to work offsite. "They're going to start measuring how much time people are in the office and penalizing those who are not," he told us, on the condition of anonymity. We're willing to bet this bank can't pull off their policing effort for long. They need the 10xers more than the 10xers need them. Furthermore, the manner with which they are instituting new policy—without any feedback from their active employees, treating their people like cogs in a machine—runs directly counter to the very game-changing revolution we are describing.

Rubenstein himself says he has mixed feelings about teams being present in the same room. "On the one hand, it's like making music; things do happen when you can see each other. But when you've got serious talent in North Carolina or San Diego, the fact that they're remote can actually be a strong benefit to your team, too, especially if you're working in machine learning, artificial intelligence, blockchain, computer vision—areas where expertise is rare, and working remotely is an aspect of those marketplaces."

On the other side of the coin, in the years that we've managed tech geniuses, we've accumulated countless stories that speak to the enormous benefits reaped by companies that do *not* pass over talent simply because of unusual demands.

In one such instance, a brilliant 10xer we represent named Ryan wanted to be able to work onsite and offsite whenever he desired, and mostly at the hours of his choosing. Ryan was being courted by a best-in-class

cybersecurity start-up. His request posed no problem for the company's CEO Arthur who believed that it was better to have Ryan under these conditions than not at all. Arthur knew that putting Ryan's brain power to good use was more important than punching a time clock.

After successfully utilizing Ryan for a number of months, the company ran into a data science problem unrelated to the work that he was doing for them. Still, once he got wind of the problem, our 10xer Ryan was beyond excited about the challenge of taking on a big, hairy, new problem that no one else had yet solved. He was granted permission to work on the issue, and his solution ended up being a game-changer for the company. The result? A radically different valuation for the cybersecurity company on their next round of funding. Just by being flexible and embracing Ryan's demands, Arthur was able to realize value far greater than what he paid.

There's another eye-opening story about the power of 10x flexibility that we love to share with newbies trying to understand the concept. Back in 2017, a thirty-five-year-old freelance software engineer and long-time 10x client named Greg Sadetsky was visiting New York City and sitting in a local internet cafe when Hurricane Harvey ripped into the Gulf of Mexico. As various online communities around the world scrambled to offer the victims assistance, Sadetsky hunkered down and brainstormed new mapping tools to help aggregate information for volunteer rescuers. He wasn't employed by or connected to any formal rescue or weather or environmental association. He was just a concerned citizen. The clock was ticking, and lives were being lost.

As an article by Daniel Terdiman in *Fast Company* describes it, a member of the US Coast Guard named Nathan spotted Sadetsky's map and contacted him. Nathan suggested some new functionalities to assist with the dispatch of helicopter crews. "Over the worst five days of Harvey," Terdiman writes, "the Coast Guard utilized Sadetsky's mapping tools on more than 700 missions that resulted in the rescue of more than 1,700 people, as well as getting urgent medical resources where they

were needed."[8] The Coast Guard has subsequently used this software in other disasters.

The 10xers are doing some of the most important work of the twenty-first century, *because they love doing it*.

But they can't do it right if they're hitched to a twentieth-century wagon.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A 10x COMPANY	
0x Company	Allows no remote work and no flex time for people to work off-hours.
5x Company	Is aware that there are productivity increases from better work environments, but still insists on too many meetings, and employs distracting micromanagement.
10x Company	Understands that flow state and deep work trump every other consideration when it comes to productivity. It only requires talent to be involved in essential meetings. Otherwise it lets them do their thing.

EVOLUTION 4-3V3R

Nowadays, the true 10xer can write their own ticket. But just how does a 10xer become 10x? We'll explore this topic more deeply later in Section II, but up front, it's important to accept that the old model of "fixed talent" is kaput. A 10xer, by definition, is not just somebody who can do one thing very well. In these turbulent times, a specialist won't cut it. Tech problems tend to be interdisciplinary in nature, and if you can only do one thing, your value ends when you hit the border of your skills. True 10xers don't hit that border—they plow right on through and keep learning.

Recent studies demonstrate that skills needed for future employment are near impossible to predict because of the rapid rate of change. Adi Gaskell, contributor to *Forbes*, recently declared that "the school ➔ work ➔ retire model is increasingly defunct, and the future will see work and learning blend into one."[9] In what is sometimes referred to as "the fourth industrial revolution," the traditional four-year degree has been debunked for all time in favor of new "knowledge delivery systems" that keep the motivated on the cutting edge, year after year, season after season, even week to week.

One 10xer we spoke to, who wished to remain anonymous, put it like this: "Being too comfortable to a point where you are no longer challenged can now be considered a step backward."

Another 10xer put it this way: "The challenges I love most are doing what seems *undoable*—time-wise, conceptually, and especially technically."

Sam Brotherton is a Harvard-educated 10xer who has handled complex programming for everyone from Whisper and Google to pop star will.i.am. At the time of this writing, Sam eschews full-time employment in favor of heading his own consulting team, and he sees the move toward constant education as integral to the 10x mindset. "It's honestly one of the reasons I enjoy being independent," he explains. "The tech world is evolving really, really quickly. And if you don't constantly evolve yourself, you are going to get left behind. I'm someone who does value being at the cutting edge. I'm currently focused on machine learning and AI, where, in order to stay relevant, you do have to be constantly reading the tech blogs and trying new things. Full-time work with one company can be a problem—it's actually easier to stay abreast of current trends if you're starting a new project every six months."

It's worth noting that Sam works (and educates himself) almost entirely remotely from his home in Salt Lake City. Of his last ten clients, two have been based in Los Angeles, two in San Francisco, two in New York City, one in Switzerland, and one in Chicago. He's only ever had one client from Salt Lake City. "They found me through word of mouth totally

unrelated to Utah, and then, when it turned out we were in the same city, we decided to meet up in person just once to close the project. But all the work was remote."

Guessing which subset of master skills are going to be the most valuable next is just that—guessing. The only thing prognosticators seem to agree on is that the ability and desire to learn, change, and evolve at an incredibly fast rate will be *the* crucial components of tomorrow's crop of 10xers. Constant self-evaluation and constant evolution are now the basic survival tools of a radically fluctuating marketplace. Real game changers know how to change themselves most of all.

Paradoxically, although 10xers are paid handsomely, hoarded by Fortune 500 companies, and compared to rock stars and MVPs by the media, one of the first things to go in this new landscape is the myth of the solo maverick, that old cornerstone of the American Dream. The emphasis on teamwork and interconnectedness in tech is so strong that it leaves little room for prima donnas, sometimes referred to as Diva Developers.

"In Start-up Land, highly functional teams are the only way," says Rubenstein, who has been both a top programmer himself and a manager of top programmers. "If you've got someone who isn't really an active member of the team, it's difficult to find out what they're doing because, by definition, there's not a lot of *communication*, right? They have to be particularly mature and communicative to be high-functioning."

We'll talk more in Chapter 9 about the combo of being both talent and manager, and the great gains that come with mastering both roles. For Rubenstein, having to wear two hats has given him unique insight into the art of overseeing 10xers. "I approach my team ready to learn from them, because we're taking a journey together. I've been on their side. I myself was a cocky kid and not easy to manage, and it took a lot of success and failure to get me to professional maturity. Now I understand—a great manager asks you questions, understands who you are. What are your stresses? What keeps you awake at night? Some people need public praise, some can't stand it. Putting yourself in their shoes is the only way to manage a team."

Hero myths notwithstanding, in the twenty-first century, it takes a finely tuned, integrated team with a shared set of goals and beliefs to martial an idea through to success—no exceptions. Sure, Jeff Bezos, Mark Zuckerberg, and Steve Jobs had unique visions, but without being able to incentivize and effectively manage those around them toward cohesive execution, they could not have gotten far. Bezos built his company on what he called the two-pizza team[10]—small groups that two pizzas can feed (ironic since his company would now take about 150,000 pizzas to feed). Steve Jobs famously said that his model for business was the Beatles: "Four guys who kept each other's, kind of, negative tendencies in check . . . the total was greater than the sum of the parts."[11]

For Rubenstein, it's the integration and interconnectedness that we're really talking about. "Teamwork is an actual rubric, right? It's not fifty pairs. It's a concept, but what does that concept really mean? Well—it means communication, daily stand up. Simply put, *conversation*. A lot of soft skills they don't necessarily teach you in programming school."

The 10xer intuitively grasps the importance of the team. Put another way, if you can't evolve with your team, you're just not 10x. In the common parlance, for modern companies to succeed, "the whole team needs to be on the same page," with the same set of overall values and a shared vision for success. A key invention toward this is the OKR (Objectives and Key Results),[12] which has allowed team management and expectation-setting to become less puffery, more science. OKR was first implemented by Intel's Andy Grove in the 1970s but the system has become a staple for many heavy hitters, utilized and popularized by Google, LinkedIn, Intel, Zynga, Sears, Oracle, Twitter, and so many others. It's beautifully simple: three to five high-level Objectives are set up. Objectives should be ambitious, qualitative, time-bound, and actionable by the person or team they're assigned to. Under each Objective there should be three to five measurable Key Results. Each Key Result should be quantifiable, achievable, lead to objective grading, and be difficult, but not impossible. OKR results can be based on growth, performance, or engagement.

The real lesson underlying the growing primacy of OKR in the workplace is not just that objectives and results can and must be measured. It's that accountability is now a shared object for the team. In a stark contrast to old models of ambition and success—think *Mad Men*, or Ayn Rand and *The Fountainhead*—the team now owns invention and disruption, struggle and aspiration, setbacks and breakthroughs. In fact, making it on the team *is* the new success.

It's a tough lesson for some.

Take Brady, a forty-something, certifiable genius. Brady had killer deep-work skills ranging from gaming to mobile, front-end to back-end. He was a fairly early client of ours, one of the first people we took on when we began representing tech talent, and with his set of strengths, his experience, and his gravitas, we were sure he was going to be an amazing resource for the kinds of companies we were talking to. We could envision dozens of work placements where he'd shine.

Sadly, after a few gigs, it became clear that Brady's ability to deal with the companies where we were placing him was weak. He was great—as a solo act—but he didn't play so well with others. His EQ didn't match his IQ. After addressing these issues with him several times, we needed to cut bait. This was a moment we needed to learn to fail fast. We could not take further risks with a 5xer.

Brady was an unusual version of Diva Developer. As popular bloggist and software creator Neil Green puts it, this breed of coder will take any attempt to be managed as an insult. For Green, the average "Diva problem personality is commonly found among long-time developers who were deeply involved in the company's early success. Now, years later, thanks to their long-standing relationships with company founders, they believe they are beyond reproach by a mere middle-manager."

The Diva Dev is the dead opposite of a 10xer, and, of course, everybody knows that these types infect the whole project with low clarity and worse morale. No adaptability means no communication, and that means no 10x results.

On the flip side, we were referred to a younger talent named Katie who had a great attitude and a fairly flexible set of skills. We placed Katie on a gig quickly and when issues arose, she absorbed our coaching and swiftly adapted her work style to incorporate the feedback. Katie continues to thrive in a variety of different consultancies and she uses us liberally to help ensure that small issues don't turn into big ones. In addition to her enormous talent, Katie gets the power of harmonizing with the team. Her EQ and her drive to better understand her own blind spots serve to enhance her exceptional IQ.

Here at home base, Michael himself has begun an annual tradition of requesting anonymous feedback from all the stakeholders in his life, and not just his work life. He solicits candor from family, friends, companies he advises, co-board members, employees who answer to him, clients he serves, coaches, and, of course, his business partner Rishon, his wife, Jenny, and even his teenage kids, Rainen and Lucy.

Of course, some feedback needs to be taken with a grain of salt. The recipient must always evaluate if the person giving feedback has pure motives or if their bias or motivation is causing the feedback to be slanted.

One simple rule of thumb: When someone always gives a certain kind of feedback to everyone they meet, their words can be discounted to some degree. If the criticism sounds way off the mark, checking in with other sources is definitely advised.

All feedback is not created equal.

Still, for the true 10xer, or anybody aspiring to be one, feedback is gold.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE 10xer	
0xer	Gets one degree and thinks he or she is done.
5xer	May pick up skills through work experience, but doesn't go outside for continued education.
10xer	Is not only a lifelong learner, has the grit to face and overcome shortcomings through head-on feedback, which is solicited when it is not proffered.

SURFING THE GENERATIONS

Perhaps the most controversial component of the new workplace is the wide variety of generational differences that coexist on the job today. It's only going to get wilder. No less than 50 percent of the working world will soon be composed of millennials and Generation Zers. Obviously, a smart manager or entrepreneur will learn to communicate with people of all ages, but the newest generations entering the workplace pose particular challenges. They think differently and require different incentives. They've grown up on customized playlists and personalized medicine. Three, four, and five beats away from the twentieth century, their lives have always been digital, always connected. They are the living byproduct of a high tech world—it's no wonder so many 10xers are millennials.

To complicate matters, parents of millennials have instilled in their children that they are uniquely gifted from infancy. They have been told they can achieve anything that they set their minds to. This may not seem like an outrageous claim to them, especially when the most powerful information device in human history can be stuffed into your back pocket.

It's no wonder millennials want to be managed on their own terms.

There's a spate of comical YouTube videos and *Saturday Night Live* skits about this unusual generation. They're easy to make fun of, easy to misunderstand. But all joking aside, those who can facilitate the formidable talents of millennials and Gen Zers will end up winning big. Often-maligned and misread as flakes, millennials are values driven, and if you can find and harness their passion for good, you're in business. Sound familiar? It should—this very quality is often found in 10xers of all ages.

As Anna Liotta, a noted speaker who lectures around the world on generational psychology, puts it, "You are losing talent if you don't know how to lead another generation . . . because they've got options. If what they want to create in their world is not being fulfilled at your organization, they are listening to the invitation from someone else. What they're asking in their heart, in their language is, 'I want to change the world—can I do that from here?'"[13]

We've had our share of run-ins with flighty millennials, but we've also taken tremendous pride in helping a few grow into formidable 10xers. Our colleague Julie Hershman, a New York-based talent agent who has handled musicians, tech geniuses, large events, and more, is a great example. Over the course of five years, Julie went from receptionist to senior management by age twenty-seven—the most reliable person in the room. When she arrived to us fresh out of college, she was quiet. Spookily quiet. The first time we took her out for a drink and got her to speak, Rishon turned to Michael and said, "Oh, that's what Julie sounds like!"

"I couldn't even haggle at a flea market before joining 10x Management," Julie remembers. "The biggest roadblock was dealing with certain customers, specifically older men that thought they knew everything, that were always in the right, and would raise their voices. I had a lot to overcome."

Over just a few years, through patient managerial guidance, Julie emerged from her shell and grew into an assertive powerhouse. She always had the smarts but her power didn't yet have an outlet. We didn't know much about millennials, but instinct told us micromanaging a

person of her generation wasn't going to work. Instead, we went counterintuitive, and opted to give her the widest berth possible. We guided by listening. "Rishon and Michael had a very open door policy," Julie says. "And I felt they had a great deal of confidence in me, even as I was just learning."

Since external confidence was the limiting factor, we showered Julie with extra (but legitimate) compliments, promoted her, and increased her responsibilities and her comp before she got a chance to ask. We even pushed her to lead a group in a public setting, difficult but worthwhile. Julie's worth quickly became clear to us and, more important, to her. She now manages other people, software projects, agents of every stripe, and can negotiate with the best of them. In fact, as of this writing, Julie is our lead agent, training newbies and helping to run the show. "Today, I have the ability to negotiate, to handle very complicated customer service issues, to juggle a lot of emails and priorities at once, and to put out fires. I've broadened my skill set and opened my eyes."

It was only by tuning in to the special wavelength of millennials that we were able to help Julie access her strengths. It didn't happen overnight, but once we were able to connect with her desire to help and protect others, Julie moved into the agent role and became like a grizzly overseeing her young, looking after our tech and musical talent. Understanding what was important to her was more than half the battle.

The twenty-first-century workplace may appear a labyrinth to the uninitiated, but it really boils down to openness to third party feedback, group efforts, greater horizontality, greater freedom for the 10xer, and an openness to differing generational attitudes. These takeaways apply to everyone, but younger generations, such as millennials and Gen Zers, have been especially influenced by the radical innovations of 10xers.

Into this new world, the 10x talent enters—as a free agent. To accomplish the unique feat of unheard-of success, they will need strong managerial guidance. In our next chapter, we'll unpack just what great talent management for the 10x age looks like.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A 10x COMPANY	
0x Company	Has made no accommodations to understand the generational differences. They expect younger workers, raised in a digital world, to slip into rules and responsibilities that are antiquated and off-putting.
5x Company	Acknowledges generational differences and knows that they need to bend their culture to the new workforce, but they're struggling with how to personalize the environment to the individual when their infrastructure is rigid and brittle and built around the collective.
10x Company	Has implemented OKRs because they know that they need buy-in from everyone. They do quarterly reviews of every employee as well as provide clarity on career path and trajectory. They've also implemented the *why* of their business to their whole team.

TAKEAWAYS FROM CHAPTER 1

- The contemporary workplace is in the middle of a game changing overhaul, a real live revolution, instigated in large part by the spirit of invention that first blossomed in the Silicon Valley in the 1970s.
- Leading the revolution are 10xers, a rare breed of high IQ, high EQ super-talent that have the power to deliver more than ten times expected results. 10xers are natural problem-solvers who do it because they love it.
- 10xers shine when they are given the time and space to enter a flow state of deep work and do what they do best.
- To be 10x requires endless self-analysis, endless self-education, and endless reinvention.
- Teamwork is at the heart of 10x production. So is openness to feedback. The Old School Boss/employee hierarchy is out.
- New, younger generations are bringing a new set of energies to the workplace, many of which mirror that of the 10xer. The smart manager will learn to connect with them as humans and help them harness their enormous powers, recognizing the many places where 10xers specifically and millennials in general share values.
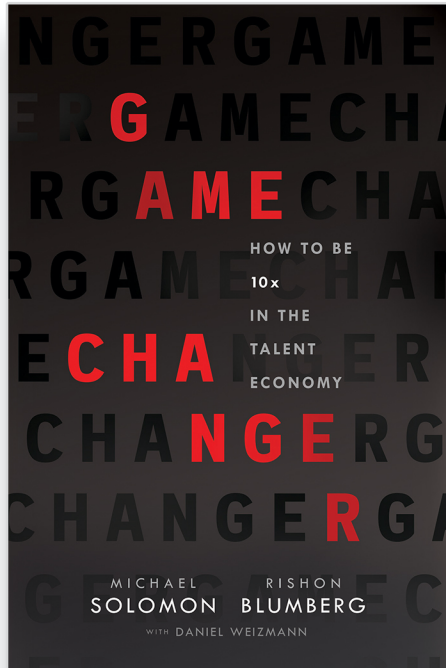
10x talent brings at least 10 times the value to your organization. The new book Game Changer teaches you how to attract and effectively manage these sought-after individuals necessary for your survival in this rapidly changing era of business.

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