



Editor-in-Chief

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PECKING ORDER

William Muir wanted to know how to breed more productive chickens. In 2005, the Purdue University researcher published the results of his study, which was designed to determine whether breeding the most prodigious egg-layers would result in greater overall productivity. These high producers were also the most aggressive. Muir separated his chickens into two groups: the top egg producers in one group and the average egg producers in another.

Entrepreneur Margaret Heffernan explained the outcome of this experiment in a recent TED talk. At the end of six generations, the average group was fit and even more productive—egg laying had increased 68 percent. The high-production group, comprising what Heffernan termed “superchickens,” had a very different outcome. All but three of them were dead. They had been pecked to death by their fellow high performers. The superchickens had been able to maintain their high egg production only by suppressing the production of other chickens.

Heffernan contends that the traditional management technique of rewarding the loudest and most aggressive employees in the workplace can have similar pitfalls—reducing productivity and decimating morale. By encouraging the superchickens in our own organizations, we hear only a handful of ideas from a few people. This, says Heffernan, is a poor way to innovate. Instead, company cultures must change to encourage the participation of all employees.

In her recent book *Beyond Measure*:

The Big Impact of Small Changes, Heffernan argues that workplace cultures can change to reward collaborative behavior and discourage superstars from dominating an organization. Workplace cultures, she says, are nonlinear, so minor adjustments can have a huge impact. “Small changes—listening, asking questions, sharing information—alter beyond measure the ideas, insights, and connections those systems are capable of producing.”

This month’s cover story, “The Highly Evolved Leader” by Senior Editor Mark Tarallo, discusses how leaders can contribute to a culture of productivity and encourage average “chickens” to contribute to the success of the entire team. Shifting roles from a boss who must be heeded to a coach who inspires collaboration requires effort and intention. However, Heffernan urges that such a shift is badly needed.

Companies cannot afford to ignore workplace dysfunction, says Heffernan. In a global marketplace where technology provides unprecedented communication, innovation is required merely to keep up. Making a breakthrough that ensures success requires ingenuity and teamwork. “Our challenges are too big, the times too urgent, and the human capacity locked inside organizations too rich to let any of it go to waste,” Heffernan says.

Muir described it simply: “In terms of energy, you can waste energy by maintaining a pecking order,” he said in a press release about his study. “But if animals don’t care about a pecking order and they get along, that energy is transferred to production. So it’s a winning situation.” ■