

Linchpin

Seth Godin—2010

A FIRST LOOK AT LINCHPIN

- If you're not indispensable (yet) it's because you haven't made that choice. My goal is to help you see that the choice is yours.
- We have gone from two teams (management and labor) to a third team, the linchpins. These are people who own their own means of production, who can make a difference, lead us, and connect us.
- The linchpin is an individual who can walk into chaos and create order. Someone who can invent, connect, create, and make things happen. Every worthwhile institution has indispensable people who make differences like these.

THE NEW WORLD OF WORK

- This is your opportunity. The indispensable employee brings humanity and connection and art to her organization. She is the key player, the one who's difficult to live without, the person you can build something around.
- You reject whining about the economy and force yourself to acknowledge that the factory job is dead. Instead, you recognize the opportunity of becoming indispensable, highly sought after, and unique. If a Purple Cow is a product that's worth talking about, the indispensable employee—I call her a linchpin—is a person who's worth finding and keeping.
- And of course, sometimes a prospect does pick a particular business. She recognizes it or trusts it or it comes with a recommendation. But more and more (and most of the time), she does precisely what the contractor in Queens did. She picks the cheap one. They're all the same. And you? Your resume sits in a stack next to plenty of other resumes. Each striving to fit in and meet the requirements. Your cubicle is next to the other cubes, each like the other. Your business card and suit and approach to problems—all designed to fit in. You keep your head down and you work hard and you hope you get picked.
- Sounds a lot like Hector. This is uncomfortable, but it's true. The people you're hoping will hire you, buy from you, support you, and interact with you have more choices and less time than ever before.
- Amazon.com took the idea of a man inside the computer and created a service with the same name. A person or company can present a task to the Mechanical Turk Web site, and hordes of invisible people will chip away at it, doing work that's eerily human but requires no personal interaction and very little money.
- For example, John Jantsch took an interview he did with me (about forty minutes of audio) and posted it to a site that uses the Turk as its labor. For just a few dollars, the site took the recording, chopped it into tiny bits, and parceled it out to anonymous laborers who each transcribed their little section.
- They pay their workers (all of whom speak English, know how to type, and have a computer with an Internet connection) about nineteen cents for each minute transcribed. I figure that's about two dollars an hour when you calculate all their labor. And there's no shortage of transcribers. An

eighty-dollar project becomes a fifteen-dollar project when you process it with the Mechanical Turk. That's a 70 percent decrease in cost and a vast increase in speed.

- **Most white**-collar workers wear white collars, but they're still working in the factory. They push a pencil or process an application or type on a keyboard instead of operating a drill press. The only grease they have to get off their clothes at the end of the day is the grease from the take-out food at lunch. But its factory work. It's factory work because it's planned, controlled, and measured. It's factory work because you can optimize for productivity. These workers know what they're going to do all day—and it's still morning.
- The white-collar job was supposed to save the middle class, because it was machine proof. A machine could replace a guy hauling widgets up a flight of stairs, but a machine could never replace someone answering the phone or running the fax machine.
- It starts with bloggers, musicians, writers and others who don't need anyone support her permission to do their thing. So a blogger named Brian Clark makes a fortune launching a wonderful new theme for his WordPress
- These individuals have all the technical, manufacturing, and distribution support they need, so they are both capitalists and workers. The organizations they work for have a very low PERL. In fact, for solely owned organizations, there aren't any easily replaced laborers
- The Hierarchy of Value
 - Create/invent
 - Connect
 - Sell
 - Produce
 - Grow
 - Hunt
 - Lift
- Lots of people can lift. That's not paying off anymore. A few people can sell. Almost no one puts in the work to create or invent. Up to you.
- Now, the only way to grow is to stand out, to create something worth talking about, to treat people with respect and to have them spread the word. Now I want to make a similar but much more personal argument:
- **You have no right to that** job or that career. After years of being taught that you have to be an average worker for an average organization, that society would support you for sticking it out, you discover that the rules have changed. The only way to succeed is to be remarkable, to be talked about. But when it comes to a person, what do we talk about? People are not products with features, benefits, and viral marketing campaigns; they are individuals. If we're going to talk about them, we're going to discuss what they do, not who they are. You don't become indispensable merely because you are different. But the only way to be indispensable is to be different. That's because if you're the same, so are plenty of other people. The only way to get what you're worth is to stand out, to exert emotional labor, to be seen as indispensable, and to produce interactions that organizations and people care deeply about.

THINKING ABOUT YOUR CHOICE

- **If your organization** wanted to replace you with someone far better at your job than you, what would they look for? I think it's unlikely that they'd seek out someone willing to work more hours, or someone with more industry experience, or someone who could score better on a standardized test. No, the competitive advantage the marketplace demands is someone more human, connected, and mature. Someone with passion and energy. Capable of seeing things as they are and negotiating multiple priorities as she makes useful decisions without angst. Flexible in the face of change. Resilient in the face of confusion. All of these attributes are choices, not talents, and all of them are available to you.
- In a factory, doing a job that's not yours is dangerous. Now, if you're a linchpin, doing a job that's not getting done is essential.
- The world works too fast for centralized control. These systems can't be run by a supervisor at the top of the organizational chart. Bullet trains in Japan run fast and on schedule without a centralized switchboard. It turns out that pushing decision making down the chart is faster and more efficient. So now, having learned from machines, organizations are applying the same logic to people. Letting people in the organization use their best judgment turns out to be faster and cheaper—but only if you hire the right people and reward them for having the right attitude. Which is the attitude of a linchpin.

INDOCTRINATION: HOW WE GOT HERE

- What They Should Teach in School; Only two things
 - 1. Solve interesting problems
 - 2. Lead
- Leading is a skill, not a gift. You're not born with it, you learn how. And schools can teach leadership as easily as they figured out how to teach compliance. Schools can teach us to be socially smart, to be open to connection, to understand the elements that build a tribe. While school, provide outlets for natural-born leaders, they don't teach it. And leadership is now worth far more than compliance is.

BECOMING THE LINCHPIN

- On the other hand, the freestyle world of idea creation and idea manipulation offers dramatic differences between the merely good and the truly great.
- One errant minimum-wage cog in the machine can cripple an entire brand, or at the very least, wreck the lifetime value of a customer. The two kids at Domino's who made a YouTube sensation out of cruelty to pizza (and customers) did more damage to the Domino's brand than any vice president ever could.
- The linchpin feels the fear, acknowledges it, then proceeds. I can't tell you how to do this; I think the answer is different for everyone. What I can tell you is that in today's economy, doing it is a prerequisite for success.
- Ten percent of the applications to Harvard are from people who got a perfect score on their SATs. Approximately the same number is from people who were ranked first in their class. Of course, it's impossible to rank higher than first and impossible to get an 820, and yet more than a

thousand in each group are rejected by Harvard every year. Perfection, apparently, is not sufficient. Personal interactions don't have asymptotes. Innovative solutions to new problems don't get old. Seek out achievements where there is no limit.

- Organizations that earn dramatic success always do it in markets where asymptotes don't exist, or where they can be shattered. If you could figure out how to bowl 320, that would be amazing. Until that happens, pick a different sport if you want to be a linchpin.
- If you can't be remarkable, perhaps you should consider doing nothing until you can. If your organization skipped a month's catalog because you didn't have anything great to put in it, what would happen the next month? Would the quality and user delight of your product line improve?
- David has been working in the midtown branch of Dean & DeLuca for six years. This mini-chain of high-end coffee shops in New York has very high turnover, so six years is quite an achievement. I met David while having coffee with a friend. The first thing I noticed was that he had walked over to a line of tourists and cheerfully said, "Hey, guys! We have another bathroom upstairs. No need to wait." With a smile, he moved away, energetically cleaning off tables and straightening things that didn't seem particularly crooked to me. If this was menial labor, no one told David. As the hour wore on, I saw him greet people, help without asking, offer to watch a table or get something for someone. In a coffee shop! I asked him about his attitude. He smiled, stopped for a second, and told me, "I work for blessings." Almost anyone else would have seen this job as a grind, a dead end, a mind-numbing way to spend six years. David saw it as an opportunity to give gifts. He had emotional labor to contribute, and his compensation was the blessings he got from the customers (his customers). His art was the engagement with each person, a chance to change her outlook or brighten his day. Not everyone can do this, and many who can, choose not to. David refused to wait for instructions. He led with his art.
- **If you don't have a resume**, what do you have? How about three extraordinary letters of recommendation from people the employer knows or respects? Or a sophisticated project an employer can see or touch? Or a reputation that precedes you: Or a blog that is so compelling and insightful that they have no choice but to follow up?
- Google You
- Google "Louis Monier" and you will find a search engine guru whom you might be desperate to hire for your next start-up.
- The only way to prove (as opposed to assert) that you are an indispensable linchpin—someone worth recruiting, moving to the top of the pile, and hiring—is to show, not tell. Projects are the new resumes.
- Change it through your actions and connections and generosity. Change it by so over-delivering that people post about you. Change it by creating a blog that is so insightful about your area of expertise that others refer to it. And change it by helping other people online.
- **It wasn't his** resume. Over the course of the year, Jason corresponded, with people at the company. He didn't send in a boring resume, he talked to them about his work and their needs. They hired him to do a freelance project. He excelled at that, so they gave him an assignment on spec. You can see the page he built online: <http://jasonzimdars.com/svn/highrise.html>
- Blogger Andrew Chen reports design firm IDEO is hiring marketers using a new technique. They ask applicants to make a PowerPoint presentation of their resume and then present it to a group of five or six people at the firm. The applicant has to defend the work, answer questions, and lead a discussion. One more chance to stand out, not to fit in. One more way to discover who has the

actual skills (engagement, rapport, intellect, charisma, openness) to thrive in a modern work environment.

- He can find a new solution to a problem that has caused others to quit. His art, his genius, is to reimagining the opportunity and find a new way to lean into it.

IS IT POSSIBLE TO DO HARD WORK IN A CUBICLE?

- What makes someone an artist? I don't think it has anything to do with a paintbrush. There are painters who follow the numbers, or paint billboards, or work in a small village in China, painting reproductions. These folks, while swell people, aren't artists. On the other hand, Charlie Chaplin was an artist, beyond a doubt. So is Jonathan Ive, who designed the iPod. You can be an artist who works with oil paints or marble. Sure. But there are artists who work with numbers, business models, and customer conversations. Art is about intent and communication, not substances. An artist is someone who uses bravery, insight, creativity, and boldness to challenge the status quo. And an artist takes it personally.
- Art is a personal act of courage, something one human does that creates change in another.
- Are you really willing to sell yourself out so cheap? Do you mortgage an entire (irreplaceable) day of your life for a few bucks? The moment you are willing to sell your time for money is the moment you cease to be the artist you're capable of being.
- Popular Science reports: "The destruction was so complete in places that it was almost surreal," Sutt recalls. "There were troops in the streets and military helicopters hovering overhead." As Sutt moved through the wreckage of roofless and toppled-over houses, he was struck by the sense that much of the destruction could have been avoided. "In house after house," he says, "I noticed that it wasn't the wood that had failed—it was the nails that held the wood together." He devoted the next eleven years (day and night) to creating a nail that would change the fate of millions of people. Sutt had the insight that it was a nail, not the rest of the house that mattered. But the insight without dogged persistence over a decade would have been worthless. You could argue that the millions of dollars that Sutt has earned in return for his invention was money well earned, that it repaid him handsomely for his passion. There's no doubt in my mind, though, that he would have done it for free. The passion wasn't in making the money—it was in making a difference, solving a problem, creating a change that would help millions. Ed Sutt is an artist, someone who chose to make a difference instead of following a manual.
 - "Wait! Are You Saying That I Have to Stop Following Instructions and Start Being an Artist? Someone Who Dreams Up New Ideas and Makes Them Real? Someone Who Finds New Ways to Interact, New Pathways to Deliver Emotion, New Ways to Connect? Someone Who Acts Like a Human, Not a Cog? Me?"
- But it goes far beyond that. When you give something away, you benefit more than the recipient does. The act of being generous makes you rich beyond measure, and as the goods or services spread through the community, everyone benefits.
- Years ago, someone decided that there was a predictable, scalable, industrial solution to marketing. They asserted that coupons and incessant advertising, combined with distribution and aggressive pricing, were not only sufficient but essential to growing a brand. Now, as we've seen over the last decade, none of that by-the-book marketing shtick works so well. Now, it's more

common to see the success of a brand like Jones Soda—not because founder Peter van Stolk followed the rules, but because he’s an artist.

- My fundamental argument here is simple: In everything you do, it’s possible to be an artist, at least a little bit. Not on demand, not in the same way each time, and not for everyone. But if you’re willing to suspend your selfish impulses, you can give a gift to your customer or boss or coworker or a passerby. And the gift is as much for you as it is for the recipient.
- If you don’t pinpoint your audience, you end up making your art for the loudest, crankiest critics. And that’s a waste. Instead, focus on the audience that’s how choose, and listen to them, to the exclusion of all others. Go ahead and make this sort of customer happy, and the other guys can go pound sand.
- Twitter became the fastest-growing communications medium in history. Not because it followed a model, but because it broke one.
- The job might be difficult, it might require skill, but it’s a job. Your art is what you do when no one can tell you exactly how to do it. Your art is the act of taking personal responsibility, challenging the status quo, and changing people.
- A Few Questions About Emotional Labor
 - Are you indispensable at home? Would it fall apart without you?
 - What about at work? Why are you easily replaceable at one venue but not the other? Are you charming when you go on a date or meet a handsome guy at a party?
 - But not at a meeting at work? I’m wondering why we’re so easily able to expend emotional labor off the job, but uncomfortable expending the same energy on the job.
- Why didn’t you speak up at the meeting yesterday? When you had a chance to reach out and interact with a co-worker in a way that would have changed everything, what held you back? That proposal for a new project that’s been sitting on your hard drive for a year...

THE RESISTANCE

- Artists think along the edges of the box, because that’s where things get done. That’s where the audience is, that’s where the means of production are available, and that’s where you can make an impact. Shipping isn’t focused on producing a masterpiece (but all masterpieces get shipped). **I’ve produced more than** a hundred books (most didn’t sell very well), but if I hadn’t, I’d never have had the chance to write this one. Picasso painted more than a thousand paintings, and you can probably name three of them.
- As we’ll see, the greatest shortage in our society is an instinct to produce. To create solutions and hustle them out the door. To touch the humanity inside and connect to the humans in the marketplace.
- I think it is. I think the discipline of shipping is essential in the long-term path to becoming indispensable. While some artists manage to work for years or decades and actually ship something important, far more often we find the dreams of art shattered by the resistance. We give in to the fear and our art ends up lying in a box somewhere, unseen.
- When you first adopt the discipline of shipping, your work will appear to suffer. There’s no doubt that another hour, day, or week would have added some needed polish. But over time—rather quickly, actually you’ll see that shipping becomes part of the art and shipping makes it work. Saturday Night Live goes on each week, ready or not. The show is live, and it’s on Saturday. No

screwing around about shipping. There are no do-over, no stalls, and no delays. Sometimes the show suffers, of course. But on balance, it's the shipping (built right into the name) that actually makes the show work.

- The only purpose of starting is to finish, and while the projects we do are never really finished, they must ship. Shipping means hitting the publish button on your blog, showing a presentation to the sales team, answering the phone, selling the muffins, sending out your references.
- How many handshakes do you need to introduce three people? Only three. Ishita, meet Susan. Susan, meet Clay. Clay, meet Ishita. Four people need twice as many, six. And five people? Ten.
- There are two solutions to the coordination problem, and both of them make people uncomfortable, because both challenge our resistance.
 - 1. Relentlessly limit the number of people allowed to thrash. That means you need formal procedures for excluding people, even well-meaning people with authority. And you need secrecy. If you have a choice between being surprised (and watching a great project ship on time) or being involved (and participating in the late launch of a mediocre project), which do you want? You must pick one or the other.
 - 2. Appoint one person (a linchpin) to run it. Not to co-run it or to lead a task force or to be on the committee. One person, a human being, runs it. Her name on it. Her decisions.
- This way, when you are near the gorillas, it doesn't look like you're making eye contact with them. Which is threatening. Which freaks the gorillas out and has led to attacks. Eye contact, all by itself, is enough to throw your lizard brain into a tizzy.
- Give in to the resistance and you might never recover.
- Successful people learn from failure, but the lesson they learn is a different one. They don't learn that they shouldn't have tried in the first place, and they don't learn that they are always right and the world is wrong and they don't learn that they are losers. They learn that the tactics they used didn't work or that the person they used them on didn't respond.
- **Nine times out** often, the answer is no. Finding good ideas is surprisingly easy once you deal with the problem of finding bad ideas. All the creativity books in the world aren't going to help you if you're unwilling to have lousy, lame, and even dangerously bad ideas.
- Why is Carolyn Reidy, the publisher of fabled book publisher Simon & Schuster, fighting against the Kindle tooth and nail? The temptation to sabotage the new thing is huge, precisely because the new thing might work.
- Don't listen to the cynics. They're cynics for a reason. For them, the resistance won a long time ago. When the resistance tells you not to listen to something, read something, or attend something, go. Do it. It's not an accident that successful people read more books.
- It's interesting to say it out loud. "I'm doing this because of the resistance." "My lizard brain is making me anxious." "I'm angry right now because being angry is keeping me from doing my work." When you say it out loud (not think it, but say it), the lizard brain retreats in the shame
- Waiting for the daemon can be boring or even frightening. So the resistance encourages us to flee, and where better to go than to the Internet? On a day when the resistance is in charge, I check my e-mail forty-five times.
- Where do you hide your insight? You have plenty of big ideas, no shortage of breakthroughs. A friend of mine says something really smart every day, something earth-shattering once a week. And that's it. At the end of the year, he has some great blog posts and a pile of Twitter tweets to show for it. What if he harnessed even one of those ideas and fought the resistance hard enough

to actually make something of it? At the end of the year, he could show us a multimillion-dollar company, or a movement that changed the world. By the end of the year. He could have leveraged a few of those ideas into a promotion, a corner office, a parking space. The only difference between my friend and someone who changes everything is the resistance.

- By forcing myself to do absolutely no busywork tasks in between bouts with the work, I remove the best excuse the resistance has. I can't avoid the work because I am not distracting myself with anything but the work. This is the hallmark of a productive artist. I don't go to meetings.
- Leo Babauta's brilliant little book *Zen Habits* helps you think your way through this problem. His program is simple: Attempt to create only one significant work a year. Break that into smaller projects, and every day, find three tasks to accomplish that will help you complete a project. And do only that during your working hours. I'm talking about an hour a day to complete a mammoth work of art, whatever sort of art you have in mind. That hour a day might not be fun, but it's probably a lot more productive than the ten hours you spend now.
- **Now, though**, in a world where linchpins are valued and cogs are not, it seems as though unchecked anxiety is the single biggest barrier between you and your goals
- Artists never do this while they're being artists. When I put myself on an Internet diet (only five checks a day, not fifty), my productivity tripled. Tripled.
- The best way to overcome your fear of creativity, brainstorming, intelligent risk-taking, or navigating a tricky situation might be to sprint.
- One day, right after a red-eye flight, the president of the company told me that he had canceled the project. He said that the company didn't have enough resources to launch all the products we had planned, our progress was too slow, and the packaging wasn't ready yet. I went to my office and spent the next twenty hours rewriting every word of text, redesigning every package, rebuilding every schedule, and inventing a new promotional strategy. It was probably six weeks of work for a motivated committee, and I did it (alone) in one swoop. Like lifting a car off an infant, it was impossible, and I have no recollection at all of the project now. The board saw the finished work, reconsidered, and the project was back on again. I didn't get scared until after the sprint (then I passed out). You can't sprint every day, but it's probably a good idea to sprint regularly. It keeps the resistance at bay.
- I'm trying to sell you on the idea of building a platform before you have your next idea, to view the platform building as a separate project from spreading your art. You can work on the platform every day, do it without facing the resistance. As the platform gets bigger and stronger, you get to launch each idea a little farther uphill.
- One Way to Thrash and Overcome Resistance
 - Here's how I make stuff. I've used this technique to launch multimillion-dollar software projects, write books, plan vacations, work in teams, work solo, and write a blog. All projects that ship on time.
 - The first step is to write down the due date. Post it on the wall. It's real. You will ship on this date, done or not.
 - The next step is to use index cards. Post-it notes, Moleskin notebooks, fortune cookies, whatever you can embrace. Write down every single notion, plan, idea, sketch, and contact. This is when you go fishing. Get as much help as you like. Invite as many people in as you can. This is their big chance.

- This is where the thrashing and dreaming begin. It's very hard to get people you work with to pay attention at this moment. Since the deadline is so far away, their lizard brains are asleep and there's no fear or selfish motivation available. People focus on emergencies, not urgencies, and getting yourself (and them) to stop working on tomorrow's deadlier and pitch in now isn't easy. A big part of the work, then, is to get yourself (and your team, if you have one) to step up and dream. On a regular basis, collate the cards and read 'em aloud to the team. This process will inevitably lead to more cards.
- Then, put the cards into a database. I use FileMaker Pro, but you can use any simple database. (You can even use a pad of paper.) If you have a group, try to find a group database for the Web. Every card gets its own record.
- The record can include words, images, sketches, and links to other cards. The idea is that this is your thrashing playground. Let the team play along. Rearrange. Draw. Sketch. Make sure everyone understands that this is the very last chance they have to make the project better.
- One person (that would be you) then goes through the database and builds a complete description of the project. If it's a book, then you've got a forty-page outline. If it's a Web site, then you have every single screen and feature. If it's a conference, then you have an agenda, a menu, a list of venues, and so on. It's the blueprint.
- Take this blueprint NOT to everyone, but to the few people who have sign-off control, the people with money, your boss. They can approve it, cancel the project, or suggest a few compromises.
- Then say, "If I deliver what you approved, on budget and on time. Will you ship it?" Don't proceed until you get a yes. Iterate if you must, but don't get started simply because you're in a hurry. Do not accept "Well, I'll know it when I see it." Not allowed.
- Once you get your yes, go away and build your project, thrash-free. Ship on time, because that's what a linchpin does.
- If you decide you want to please the critics, the same people who make a living hating the sort of thing you do, it's easy to give up in advance.
- **A decade ago**, I came up with the idea for Permission Marketing. In the shower. I still remember the where and the when. It was one of those little ideas, something that could easily disappear. The resistance would be happy if all your little brainstorms disappeared, because then they wouldn't represent a threat, would they? The challenge is in being alert enough to write them down, to prioritize them, to build them, and to ship them out the door. It's a habit, it's easy to learn, and it's frightening.

THE POWERFUL CULTURE OF GIFTS

- There are three reasons why it's now urgent to understand how gift culture works. First, the Internet (and digital goods) has lowered the marginal cost of generosity. Second, it's impossible to be an artist without understanding the power that giving a gift creates. And third. The dynamic of gift giving can diminish the cries of the resistance and permit you to do your best work.
- Shepard Fairey didn't seek to monetize the Obama Hope poster. He gave it away with a single-minded obsession. The more copies he gave away, the closer he came to achieving his political, personal, and professional goals.

- Part of the reason for this flip is the digital nature of our new gift system. If I create an idea, the Internet makes it possible for that gift to spread everywhere, quite quickly, at no cost to me. Digital gifts, ideas that spread—these allow the artist to be far more generous than he could ever be in an analog world.
- Thomas Hawk.
- As I wrote in my previous book, Tribes, the new form of marketing is leadership, and leadership is about building and connecting tribes of liked minded people.
- A business coach writes and gives away a two-hundred-page e-book jammed with useful tips and secrets. Everything he knows, online, for free. Is this generous or stupid? Is there an easier way to make it clear that he has wisdom to spare:
 - Gifts not only satisfy our needs as artists, they also signal to the world that we have plenty more to share.
- A critical underpinning at AA is that no money changes hands. There's no central organization collecting dues, no fee to attend a meeting, no payments from one member to another. The act of helping a fellow alcoholic for free has two effects: First, it brings the giver and the recipient closer together, creating a tribe. And second, it creates an obligation for the recipient. Not an obligation to reciprocate, because she really can't and it's not expected, but an obligation to help the next person. And so the movement grows.
- Three circles have traditionally defined the cycle of art among fine artists, such as painters and sculptors. I think these circles can work for anyone giving a gift or making a change in the world. The first circle represents true gifts—items that an artist gleefully and willingly shares. This circle comprises friends or family or the people you work with. Someone comes over for dinner and you don't charge them. The meal is a gift. Friends ask for a stock tip or accounting help. You don't charge them. It's a gift. The second circle is the circle of commerce. In this circle are people and organizations that pay for your art. They pay for a souvenir edition or a poster or a speech. They pay for consulting or a house concert or a newsletter subscription. ConEd pays Paul to work on its gas lines, knowing that his gift of working well with people comes along for the ride. And now, the Internet creates a third circle, the circle of your tribe. Your followers, fans who may become friends. Friendlies. This circle is new. It's huge and it's important, because it enables you to enlarge the second circle and make more money, and because it enables you to affect. More people and improve more lives.
- In each case, the lack of a transaction created a bond between the giver and the recipient, and perhaps surprisingly, the giver usually comes out even further ahead.
- Great bosses and world-class organizations hire motivated people, set high expectations, and give their people room to become remarkable.

THERE IS NO MAP

- One of the fascinating aspects of business and organized movements is that there's some correlation between the passion and effort that people bring to a project and the outcome.
- Forty years ago, Richard Branson, who ultimately founded Virgin Air, found himself in a similar situation in an airport in the Caribbean. They had just canceled his flight, the only flight that day. Instead of freaking out about how essential the flight was, how badly his day was ruined, how his entire career was now in jeopardy, the young Branson walked across the airport to the charter

desk and inquired about the cost of chartering a flight out of Puerto Rico. Then he borrowed a portable blackboard and wrote, "Seats to Virgin Islands, \$39." He went back to his gate, sold enough seats to his fellow passengers to completely cover his costs, and made it home on time. Not to mention planting the seeds for the airline he'd start decades later. Sounds like the kind of person you'd like to hire.

- I stood up to leave and said to the other twenty-three passengers, "I'm leaving and driving to the White Plains airport. We'll be there in about two hours. If you want to join me, I have room for four other people. And it's free." No one moved. I drove myself home. I've thought about that a lot. Some of these people may have figured I was some sort of extremely well-dressed business-traveler psychopath. My guess, though, is that most of them were very content to blame United for their situation. If they had stood up and left the plane, the situation would have belonged to them. Their choice, their responsibility.
- A brilliant negotiator does our understanding the other side as honestly as anyone can.
- Smart organizations seek out people with the ability to see the world as it actually is. But that skill is worthless if you don't acknowledge the truth and share it.

MAKING THE CHOICE

- My decree: If you own a copy, burn it. Replace it with Cosmic Encounter or chess or a big box filled with wooden blocks. Please don't look at school or even board games the same way again. If they're teaching your kids or future employees to be map readers and agenda followers, make them stop.
- Now, we go looking for something to distract us. That's the culture of the Internet, combined with the culture of the white-collar cubicle worker, combined with fear. You don't want to take initiative or responsibility, so you check your incoming mail, your Twitter stream, and your blog comments. Surely, there's something to play off of, something to get angry about, some meeting to go to. I know someone who goes to forty conferences a year and never seems to actually produce anything. And you can repeat this process forever. Forever. It never ends. The alternative is to draw a map and lead.
- Perhaps the biggest shift the new economy brings is self-determination. Access to capital and appropriate connections aren't nearly as essential as they were. Linchpins are made, not born.
- These are internal choices, not external factors. How we respond to the opportunities and challenges of the outside world now determines how much the outside world values us. In this section I want to outline some of the roles the linchpin plays and how you can choose to play them.
- The funny thing is that learning how to add joy, create art, or contribute humanity is a lot easier than learning how to play the guitar. For some reason, we work on the technique before we worry about adding the joy. If you're going to go to all the trouble of learning the song and performing it, then SING IT. Sing it loud and with feeling and like you mean it. Deliver it, don't just hand it over like a bank teller. When you answer the phone or greet me at your office or come to a meeting or write something, don't bother if all you're going to do is do it. Sing it or stay home. If you get a chance, Google "More Cowbell" and you'll find what is certainly the most relevant Saturday Night Live skit of all time. There's a lonely cowbell player in Blue Oyster Cult, and every time he plays the cowbell, he feels horrible. He's standing out in a band that wants him to

fit in. It takes a brilliant record producer to persuade him that if you're going to play the cowbell, play the cowbell. Blogger Brian Clark explains that adding more cowbell is pretty much your only choice. Either that, or have no cowbell at all.

- The fact is, a bigger badge isn't going to help at all. People aren't going to follow you because you order them to. They're not going to seek out a new path because you tell them that they must. Linchpins don't need authority. It's not part of the deal. Authority matters only in the factory, not in your world.
- In a world with only a few indispensable people, the linchpin has two elegant choices:
 - 1. Hire plenty of factory workers. Scale like crazy. Take advantage of the fact that most people want a map, most people are willing to work cheaply, most people want to be the factory. You win because you extract the value of their labor, the labor they're surrendering too cheaply.
 - 2. Find a boss who can't live without a linchpin. Find a boss who adequately values your scarcity and your contribution, who will reward you with freedom and respect. Do the work. Make a difference.
- Corporate coach Deanna Vogt challenged me to fill in the sentence, "I could be more creative if only..."
- Patients who were given colostomies (an operation in which a large portion of the colon is removed) were measured on their long-term happiness. The patients who were told that the situation was permanent, that they would need to live with a bag their entire lives, ended up being happier than those who were told that there was a chance they'd recover use of their colon.
- The stressful part is the hoping. Hoping against hope that your plane will arrive, that you won't miss it, that your seat won't be given away. That you won't crash, that you'll land close to on time. Hoping that the surgery will turn out okay. Hoping that your boss won't yell at you. All of this is nerve-racking for many people.
- That's because it's work. We're used to it and we know how to do it. Yet the work of inventing, brainstorming, and overcoming the fear of shipping appears too difficult to bear. The work of getting over an emotional reaction, seeing a situation as it really is, and caring enough to provide a gift—that's beyond the pale. Nothing about becoming indispensable is easy. If it's easy, it's already been done and it's no longer valuable.

THE CULTURE OF CONNECTION

- Psychologists agree that there are five traits that are essential in how people look at us: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Emotional Stability.
- Here's the thing: these are also the signs of the linchpin. Work, great work, has been transformed in just a hundred years from doing things that involve heavy lifting to leveraging and enhancing your personality.
- Think about business-to-business sales. The key point of distinction between vendors calling on a company is rarely price. It's the perceived connection between the prospect and the organization. Now, consider job satisfaction. The key point of distinction between places to work is rarely the work you'll be asking the employee to do. It's the perceived connection between the employee and the people she works with. Thus, the individual in the organization who collects, connects,

and nurtures relationships is indispensable. This isn't about recording the information in a database somewhere. This is about holding the relationships as sacred as they deserve to be.

- The Secret of Frank at Comcast
 - He's a real person. That's the secret. Frank Eliason has been featured on the front page of The New York Times, on television, and online about a million times. Frank is the online face of Comcast Cable, the occasionally loved, frequently hated cable behemoth.
 - Frank figured out that angry customers were often using Twitter to vent their rage about Comcast and their service or lack thereof. One day, Frank tweeted back. He showed up. Not because it was in the manual or because someone told him to, but because he wanted to help. It was a gift, not his job. Frank was honestly interested in connecting, and his generosity came through.
 - And you know what happened? The tweeters rejoiced. They were so stunned that a real person (with a name!) was listening that they instantly became fans. In less than a minute, they were converted from enemies and trolls into raving fans.
- We have everything we need, so we're not buying commodities. We're not even buying products. We're buying relationships and stories and magic. Our business, our politicians, our friends—it's all the same; it's about figuring out whom we can trust and work with and who must be kept at bay.
- It's easy to take a development day to go to a conference that purports to teach you the latest techniques in chemical handling. Far more critical for the linchpin-in-training is figuring out how to project enthusiasm and get people to root for you
- Of course, Batman or Superman wouldn't need an introduction, the lesser, lower rent, heroes had to speak up and describe their superpowers. "I'm the Wasp. I have the ability to shrink to a height of several centimeters, fly by means of insectoid wings, and fire energy blasts."
 - **When you meet someone**, you need to have a superpower.

WHEN IT DOESN'T WORK

- A cornerstone of your job is selling your boss on your plans, behaving in a way that gives her cover with her boss, being unpredictable in predictable ways. You can't go from being a junior account exec to flying the company's biggest client to Cannes in a private jet and expensing it a month later. You don't start with the confidence of the company; you earn it.