

## “Linchpin”

Seth Godin

Kindle Notes by Dave Kraft

A genius looks at something that others are stuck on and gets the world unstuck. the best future available to us is a future where you contribute your true self and your best work. It's time to stop complying with the system and draw your own map. Becoming a linchpin is a stepwise process, a path in which you develop the attributes that make you indispensable. Do not internalize the industrial model. You are not one of the myriad of interchangeable pieces, but a unique human being, and if you've got something to say, say it, and think well of yourself while you're learning to say it better. Every organization needs a linchpin, the one person who can bring it together and make a difference. Some organizations haven't realized this yet, or haven't articulated it, but we need artists. Artists are people with a genius for finding a new answer, a new connection, or a new way of getting things done.

That would be you. How was it possible to brainwash billions of people to bury their genius, to give up their dreams, and to buy into the idea of being merely an employee in a factory, following instructions? The key piece of leverage was this promise: follow these instructions and you don't have to think. Do your job and you don't have to be responsible for decisions. Most of all, you don't have to bring your genius to work. The system we grew up with is based on a simple formula: Do your job. Show up. Work hard. Listen to the boss. Stick it out. Be part of the system. You'll be rewarded. The end results are legions of frustrated workers, wasted geniuses each and every one of them, working like automatons, racing against the clock to crank out another policy, get through another interaction, see another patient. It doesn't have to be this way. Leaders don't get a map or a set of rules. Living life without a map requires a different attitude. There's a huge opportunity for a third kind of participant, a linchpin, and now there is an opportunity to change all the rules that we've lived with all our lives.

Hugh MacLeod: “The web has made kicking ass easier to achieve, and mediocrity harder to sustain. Mediocrity now howls in protest.” 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. Why is society working so hard to kill our natural-born artists? When we try to drill and practice someone into subservient obedience, we're stamping out the artist that lives within. Markets are crying out. We need you to stand up and be remarkable. Be human. Contribute. Interact. Take the risk that you might make someone upset with your initiative, innovation, and insight—it turns out that you'll probably delight them instead.

Consumers say that all they want are cheap commodities. Given the choice, though, most of us, most of the time, seek out art. We seek out experiences and products that deliver more value, more connection, and more experience, and change us for the better. You can learn how to do this if you want. If you want a job where it's okay to follow the rules, don't be surprised if you get a job where following the rules is all you get to do. 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.

Would your organization be more successful if your employees were more obedient? Or, consider for a second: would you be more successful if your employees were more artistic, motivated, connected, aware, passionate, and genuine? You can't have both, of course. It turns out that pushing decision making down the chart is faster and more efficient. 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.

If your organization would get out of the way, and if you would step up, there'd be a slot like that available; for anyone. Doesn't matter if you're always right. It matters that you're always moving. Finding security in mediocrity is an exhausting process. Bill Ford hired someone who knew how to train people to live without a map. Working without a map involves both vision and the willingness to do something about what you see. Linchpins are able to embrace the lack of structure and find a new path, one that works. It's unprofitable to establish a career around the idea of doing what the manual says. The very system that produced standardized tests and the command-and-control model that chokes us also invented the résumé.

You may say, "But I'll get fired for breaking the rules." The linchpin says, "If I lean enough, it's okay if I get fired, because I'll have demonstrated my value to the marketplace. If the rules are the only thing between me and becoming indispensable, I don't need the rules. The linchpin says, "I don't want a job that a non-linchpin could get." Spend eight or ten or twelve hours a day at work (not only in the office, but online or on the phone or in your dreams), and there's not a lot of time left for the very human acts that make you who you are and who you want to be.

Art is a personal gift that changes the recipient. An artist is an individual who creates art. The more people you change, the more you change them, the more effective your art is. 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.

Perhaps your challenge isn't finding a better project or a better boss. Perhaps you need to get in touch with what it means to feel passionate. People with passion look for ways to make things happen. 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. The job is not your work; what you do with your heart and soul is the work. Successful people are successful for one simple reason: they think about failure differently. Fear of living without a map is the main reason people are so insistent that we tell them what to do. Your work is to do the work, not to do your job. Your job is about following instructions; the work is about making a difference. Your work is to ship. Ship things that make change.

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. Given the People focus on emergencies, not urgencies, and getting yourself (and them) to stop working on tomorrow's deadline 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. The only way I know of to become a successful linchpin is to build a support team of fellow linchpins.

The goal artists don't give gifts for money. They do it for respect and connection and to cause change. Great bosses and world-class organizations hire motivated people, set high expectations, and give their people room to become remarkable. Reciprocity defined as payment for my work isn't the point. It's the appreciation of my work, the way it changes people—that's my payment.

The key distinction is the ability to forge your own path, to discover a route from one place to another that hasn't been paved, measured, and quantified. Were they stupid? No. They were blinded by their attachment to the present and their fear of the future.

You can either fit in or stand out. Not both. You are either defending the status quo or challenging it. Real change rarely comes from the front of the line. It happens from the middle or even the back. Real change happens when someone who cares steps up and takes what feels like a risk. People follow because they want to, not because you can order them to. Transferring your passion to your job is far easier than finding a job that happens to match your passion. Where are the self-appointed agitators and firebrands, the people who will egg you on and push you to stand for something? The linchpin is able to invent a future, fall in love with it, live in it—and then abandon it on a moment's notice. the work of inventing, brainstorming, and overcoming the fear of shipping appears too difficult to bear.

In the case of personality, most psychologists agree that there are five traits that are essential in how people look at us: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Emotional Stability. Thus, the individual in the organization who collects, connects, and nurtures relationships is indispensable.

A linchpin helps lead, and she connects people in the organization, actively and with finesse. This takes emotional labor and it can't be done by following the instructions in a manual.

Earlier, I argued that having deep domain knowledge by itself is rarely sufficient to becoming indispensable. Combining that knowledge with smart decisions and generous contributions, though, changes things. If you want to be a linchpin, the power you bring to the table has to be very difficult to replace. Be bolder and think bigger; nothing stopping you. We don't have a talent shortage; we have a shipping shortage.