

## POWER POINTS

# How to be indispensable, without being a know-it-all



**HARVEY SCHACHTER**  
SPECIAL TO THE GLOBE AND MAIL  
PUBLISHED 57 MINUTES AGO  
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Over the past few decades as a consultant, Bruce Tulgan has watched what he calls the collaboration revolution take shape. Back in the 1990s, management was top down, within silos. Now we work across silos, interdependent, clarity about who we answer to eroded.

“Whatever your role, wherever you work – in a restaurant, store, bank, accounting firm, hospital, school, construction site, or battlefield – your job is shared services. And so is just about everybody else’s,” he writes in *Indispensable*.

In that context, he says you want to stand out as a go-to person – someone who is indispensable. “Go-to people come in every variety and work at every level, and are found in organizations of all shapes and sizes, in every industry. There are as many different styles and stories as there are go-to people. But when I look for the common denominators, what unites them all is that they know how to make themselves valuable to others, consistently, in most every interaction, and they do so over time,” he says.

Your initial instinct might be to double down on technical expertise. But he argues being top-flight at the specific work is only table stakes. And sometimes it can even be problematic, since it’s easy to slip into being an annoying know-it-all.

Keeping that danger in mind, here are the traits he outlines of go-to- people he has chronicled:

- make themselves incredibly valuable to others;

- are very good at their job;
- maintain a positive attitude and double down on hard work;
- take personal responsibility and get things done;
- are creative and tenacious but do things by the book and follow orders;
- do all things consistently, in most every interaction, over time.

But you are operating within this collaborative, at times formless, milieu. You're probably inundated with far too many requests, everything seems to be your job, and you're forced to rely on people you cannot hold accountable. It's easy to become overcommitted, so trying to assume a go-to status requires caution.

He argues that the more you serve others, accomplishing things for them, the greater your influence will become and others, in turn, will want to do things for you. You also need to know what's allowed up and down the chain of command. "You have to go vertically before you go sideways (or diagonally): Ensure alignment on priorities, ground rules, marching orders, and every next step through regular structured communication up, down, sideways, and diagonally," he advises.

You need to know when to say no or not yet, and how to say yes. "Remember, 'yes' is where all the action is. Every yes is your opportunity to add value for others and build up your real influence. Don't waste your yeses," he says. Complete what you start. Become indispensable.

In various jobs – from being a car salesman to working in hotels – writer Barry Davret noticed qualities of people who consistently earn deep respect. Those include:

- They're first, even when it hurts: Be the first to lead, the first to defend, and the first to organize.
- They value your time as much as their own time: They focus on the issues at hand when meeting with you and don't waste time.
- They choose their own path, even when it's not popular: "The people we respect most don't follow the crowd just to appease the majority. They'll do their own thing, and if nobody else joins them, so be it," he notes on *The Ladders*.
- They treat people with less power as equal: Respected leaders go out of their way to

ensure those with less power still feel an equal.

Stand out in your organization by adopting these principles.

### **QUICK HITS**

- The MAYA Principle, developed by design wizard Raymond Loewy, stands for Most Advanced, Yet Acceptable. When designing – a product, an organizational change, whatever – give users the most advanced design but not more advanced than they are willing to accept and embrace.
- Entrepreneur Seth Godin urges you to find out your if-thens, such as “if this customer closes I’ll invest in my education.” Too often the if-then is a stall he warns, postponing the future you should seek now.
- A new study has found that employees who suffer emotional or verbal abuse in an otherwise good relationship blame themselves – and redouble their efforts.
- If interviewing for a remote job, journalist Julie Anne Russell recommends asking what percentage of the team is remote, what the working hours are expected to be, what collaborative tools are being used, and how has the organization overcome challenges with remote work.
- Writing is the antidote to confusion, observes author James Clear.

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351 King Street East, Suite 1600, Toronto, ON Canada, M5A 0N1

Phillip Crawley, Publisher