

Be Indispensable

Make seven clear choices.



by Mark Samuel

MANY ORGANIZATIONS ARE plagued by leaders who are making choices today to protect themselves and their turf in a way that makes them *dispensable* and their organizations vulnerable to customer demands, competition, and recession.

I see seven choices for becoming so valuable to others that you are always in demand—truly *indispensable* to your company, direct reports and peers.

Choice 1: Purpose-driven or goal-driven. While we all have our performance goals to complete each year, and setting goals is a way to keep people focused, it is *purpose* that inspires and motivates people to excel. Do your people know your purpose, the context for their hard work and the value of their contribution to a greater good beyond their job and paycheck? Great leaders stand for something greater and motivate their workers because of their *purpose motive*—their contribution to a greater good.

Choice 2: Play big or play small. *Playing small* can take on different attributes—not speaking up to voice your opinion, resisting change, or micromanaging your direct reports. Leaders can't afford to play small. They have to make tough decisions, spark innovation, and take calculated risks. Leaders who *play big* share two qualities: 1) break down *silos* thinking and behavior—making the success of the organization more important than your division, department, or team's success and working across functional lines to share resources, resolve problems, and support other department's success through sharing information and inclusion when making decisions; 2) re-define *winning* as not determined by how successful you are, but how many other winners you develop and foster—being less focused on being the hero, and more dedicated to building other leaders, other winners and others' success. It is through others' success that your value increases.

Choice 3: Adaptable or rigid. Robert Anthony shared one of the wisest quotes, "If you find a good solution and become attached to it, the solution may become your next problem." In today's environment of accelerated change, we can't afford to rest on old solutions or

even previous standards of excellence. The *Indispensable Leader* is less about control and more about asking questions—"How do we improve our performance for our customers (internal or external)?" "How do we increase our efficiency and productivity?" "How do we improve teamwork within our team and cross-functionally?" Being adaptable leads to the next critical choice for being an *Indispensable Leader*.

Choice 4: We-centered or Me-centered. When your leadership is based on having all of the answers, making all decisions and controlling information, you're on a track of being *dispensable*. You are putting your organization at risk, but also the many direct reports in your *chain of command*. *Indispensable Leaders* engage others rather than *going it alone*. They engage their direct reports to help



in making decisions, innovating the work place, and solving challenging problems. They engage other leaders to address the challenges and breakdowns that have been systemic in the organization for years if not decades. They know that no one owns all of the attributes of critical thinking—and surround themselves with other experts to weigh in on major solutions and decisions.

So, when planning a major change, gather your experts and advisors, engage in debate, make a clear decision. As you embark on solving problems, consider the impact on the largest number of people and stakeholders possible, rather than focus on what you can control or how it will benefit you.

Choice 5: Priority-focused or activity-focused. As most organizations are challenged by having to do more with less resources, it is paradoxical that so many leaders are unable to establish clear priorities. Everything is priority #1. And, not only is it causing burn-out and confusion, but it also prevents quick

and meaningful progress. Instead, people's efforts get fragmented and dissipated, and resources are wasted. Of course, many organizations pride themselves in identifying the *4 Big Rocks* or *5 Pillars* thinking that this process sets priorities. Unfortunately, it establishes themes, but doesn't resolve the issue of sorting the 10 to 15 projects within each *Big Rock* or *Pillar* that still must be resourced.

The *Indispensable Leader* has the courage to say *no* to some projects and *yes* to others. They maintain a clear focus on what is critically important long-term, not just short term crisis management. As individuals, they are more concerned with managing outcomes rather than managing activity and checking-off lists of tasks to ensure completion. The *Indispensable Leader* refrains from micromanagement and delegates *pictures of success* and clear outcomes, so that their direct reports know exactly how to be successful and truly accountable.

Choice 6: Value others or disregard others. Some people try to be *indispensable* by taking all of the credit for the successes of others. They also compete against others to demonstrate that they are better, more qualified, and *more indispensable*. But, this is *false indispensability*. It not only takes away people's sense of value, but also diminishes value because of their controlling nature. When you are *indispensable*, you see the value that others offer—their critical thinking, their ability to build relationships, their skill in planning, or their ability to get things done. People desire to be seen accurately by others. When you see people for who they are at their best, the people who feel *seen* also feel *cared for*, *considered* and *valued*. When teams value each other for their unique and diverse qualities, morale and performance improve.

Choice 7. Accountable responses or victim responses. All leaders face big challenges, but the *indispensable* ones don't ignore them, blame others, find evidence to not make necessary changes or to hide behind their position of authority. They're accountable—meaning that *they can be counted on* by others in their workplace, families and communities. While they'll make mistakes, their accountability results in them taking ownership, learning and recovering so fast that minimal damages are felt.

Indispensable leaders build other leaders, enhance performance and develop people to optimize their potential. **PE**

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ACTION: Assess your level of indispensability.