

FEATURE ARTICLE: The Art of Being Indispensable at Work

Imagine that tomorrow morning, some high-priced workplace consultant shows up at your job. This purported expert on employee performance is there to conduct a talent review: an assessment of all the personnel in the organization. What would this expert say about you?

If you are like most people, this question might make you pause. Not because you're not great at what you do, but because these days doing your job is a lot harder. Your work requires way more than it once did: constant collaboration, managing relationships all over the organization chart, and serving a seemingly unlimited number of "internal customers" at work.

If that sounds familiar, this book is for you.

The Art of Being Indispensable at Work is the newest title from Bruce Tulgan, best-selling author of *It's Okay to Be the Boss* and CEO of RainmakerThinking, the management research, consulting and training firm he founded in 1993. *The Art of Being Indispensable* was written in response to the increasing prevalence of what he calls "overcommitment syndrome" and "siege mentality"—what most people would identify as burnout.

In 27 years of interviewing and working with employees in workplaces of all sizes, in every industry, Tulgan has identified a trend that has picked up steam in the past decade or so: day-to-day working relationships that are spread all over the organization chart. What he hears—from people at all levels—is the biggest workplace challenge today is collaborating with so many people in so many nebulous relationships.

"It's the irony of ironies: the so-called go-to person becomes anything *but* that, because overcommitment gets in the way," Tulgan says. "The process of trying to become indispensable too often means stretching oneself beyond human capacity. But the hard truth is, navigating collaborative relationships is not going away. Doing that very, very well is how go-to people are going to succeed in today's work environment."

If you have a job, and you care about doing that job well, this likely sounds familiar to you. But what is the solution? How does someone beat overcommitment, win real influence, and get the right things done today? How do you set yourself apart as an indispensable, go-to person?

At least part of the solution is, Tulgan says, about facing up to some hard new realities of what it means to be an ambitious, hardworking employee today:

- Positive attitude, hard work, personal responsibility, and being great at your job are just table stakes.
- No matter how creative and tenacious you may be, you still have to do things by the book and follow orders.
- You cannot ever do everything for everybody. Overpromising may please people up front, but if you fail to deliver, that's all they will remember.

- You must make choices about what you are not going to do, so you get the right things done. Making no choice is still a choice, and no choice is almost as bad as a bad choice.
- To make good choices, you must do your due diligence, the sooner the better, every step of the way.
- You can't be great at everything, so you need to build a repertoire of things you are known for consistently doing very well and very fast.
- You only get credit for the results you deliver. You get a lot more credit when you deliver on time and on spec.
- People are your number-one asset, but they are also very high maintenance, so managing relationships is mission critical.

Tulgan wrote *The Art of Being Indispensable* not just to help people understand these new realities, but to provide concrete strategies for dealing with them.

"All I do in my seminars is teach frustrated, would-be go-to people to imitate what the most successful go-to people actually do every day in the real world," he explains. "I've now shared those techniques with so many thousands of real people with such successful results that I knew I had cracked the code. I wrote this book so those techniques could be shared with everyone."

"By zeroing in on the behaviors that make the most successful people 'tick', Bruce highlights the key attributes that are critical to survive *and* thrive, despite the challenges," says Susan Unvarsky of Prudential Financial. If you are like most people in today's economy, that sounds like a pretty good deal.

The Art of Being Indispensable at Work: Win Influence, Beat Overcommitment, and Get the Right Things Done is available for purchase from Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and all major booksellers on July 21, 2020 from Harvard Business Review Press.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bruce Tulgan is the best-selling author of *It's Okay to Be the Boss* and the CEO of RainmakerThinking, the management research, consulting and training firm he founded in 1993. All of his work is based on 27 years of intensive workplace interviews and has been featured in thousands of news stories around the world. You can follow Bruce on Twitter @BruceTulgan or visit his website at rainmakerthinking.com.

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