Indispensable!

Becoming the Obvious Choice in Business and in Life

David Cottrell and Robert Nix
To every man there comes in his lifetime that special moment when he is tapped on the shoulder and offered the chance to do a very special thing.

What a tragedy if that moment finds him unprepared or unqualified for the work which would be his finest hour.

—Winston Churchill

This book is dedicated to every person who has the courage to prepare for his or her finest hour and become Indispensable!
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Introduction

Becoming Indispensable Begins Now

in•dis•pens•able 1: not subject to being set aside or neglected 2: absolutely necessary : essential
MERRIAM-WEBSTER’S COLLEGIATE DICTIONARY,
ELEVENTH EDITION

“How can I become indispensable—absolutely necessary and essential—to my organization?” “How can I earn my next promotion?” Aren’t those questions that we have all asked? After all, we want to earn more, learn more, and be more secure in our career.

The fact is that the selection process for promoting someone into a new opportunity or deciding who to retain during cutbacks does not begin the day the position becomes available or when cutbacks are needed. No, people are being evaluated for new opportunities long before a new position is even conceived. You see, you are interviewing and competing today and tomorrow and next week too. Whether you know it or not, decisions about your future could be based on how you handle a situation, interact, and represent the organization in your job today. Managers rarely offer greater
opportunities to someone and then expect that person to suddenly appear different, more capable, more focused. Most often, managers promote people or retain personnel based on what they already know about those people.

This book is designed to guide you to prepare for your next opportunity—right now—and help you become indispensable to your current employer. It is not for those who believe they are entitled to something or anything. Nor is it for those who are satisfied with the status quo. Tomorrow will not necessarily be better unless you begin your preparation to become indispensable today.

The strategies presented in this book are for those willing to honestly reflect on their circumstances and their daily habits—and make changes. It is for those who want to break through, do things differently, take action, challenge life, and control their own destiny. It is for those who understand that becoming indispensable for the next opportunity is a process of presenting and selling themselves and their abilities.

I have had the opportunity to work with thousands of people who sincerely desired to move up within their organization but did not know how to make it happen. Robert Nix has spent years in successful sales and in sales management. We have collaborated on this book to ensure that it provides a success path for everyone. It offers help to those searching for a career, looking to advance, or desiring to improve. It provides discussion topics and personal growth strategies that can benefit any person within any organization.

Follow the suggestions detailed in this book, and when the right time comes, it will be crystal clear to everyone that you are, indeed, Indispensable!

David Cottrell
Horseshoe Bay, Texas
SECTION ONE

Square One

Chapter 1: Escaping the Status Quo

Chapter 2: Reality Check

Chapter 3: Establishing Your Path

If you are going to fulfill your destiny, you gotta get in the game, you gotta stay in the game, and you gotta follow the game plan.

—Billy Cox
CHAPTER 1

Escaping the Status Quo

*This is like déjà vu all over again.*  
—YOGI BERRA

A four-by-six, brownish-gray cloth cubicle waits. It waits there … in the middle row, on the middle floor, in the middle of the building, in the middle of the street, in the middle of the city.

Perhaps it awaits you.

Somewhat sarcastically and with an underlying, embarrassed resentment, you call it your “achievement center.” The outer walls look no different from the next cubicle with the exception of a nameplate announcing your location in a faceless crowd of other coworkers in the same cookie-cutter, four-by-six, brownish-gray cloth achievement centers. You have placed a mirror there, by your keyboard, to alert you when some quiet passerby stops to peer uncomfortably over your shoulder. Nothing you do or say is private. You know this from experience because you hear and smell more about the lives of your fellow cubicle coworkers than you desire.
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Whether the sun shines, the wind blows, or the rain falls, you see only brief glimpses of the outside world. Along the precious landscape of windows are offices with doors, real desks, and even chairs for visitors. In these walled-off offices reside people who have somehow escaped their caste confinement in the brownish-gray modular workspaces. Now these office people watch the activities of the cubicle people and sometimes even close their walled-office doors and discuss with other walled-office people what they see . . . or don’t see. Occasionally they discuss you.

Of course there are worse places to work than that four-by-six achievement center, and work experience is important for your future. But was it ever part of the vision you had about life? Was it your dream to be confined to a nondescript, cookie-cutter existence of sameness? Was it your goal to be one of many? Organizations need people in workspaces. It does not have to be you.

There is an answer. You can escape the cubicle.

* * *

Standing behind the counter, you watch the clock. The minimum wage challenges your willingness to work through an aching back, tired feet, and embarrassing uniforms. It is the third job you have had this year, and it bears little difference from the previous two. The door opens, electronics chime, and another customer enters—no smile and dragging an attitude. The manager just informed you it is time for your employee review. Looking around, suddenly everything appears in slow motion. Every day you have hoped something better would come along. All around you are fellow employees in the identical uniforms. In this introspective moment, you recognize that they have become your mirror. You speak like them, dress like them, complain like them, and earn like them. Their view of the future has become yours. You are jolted
back to reality. A customer has spilled an industrial-sized vat of cola by the front door, and it is your responsibility to clean it up. The customer has walked away hurriedly, laughing and offering no remorse or assistance.

Of course there are worse places to work than behind a counter, and interacting with the public is valuable experience. But was it ever part of the vision you had about life? Was it your dream to wear a smock and take orders from everyone? Was it ever your hope that next year you could receive a $0.50-per-hour raise? Companies need people in smocks fulfilling requests. It does not have to be you.

There is an answer. You can escape the counter.

* * *

A business struggles. Your associates’ attitude is to put in the hours of eight to five or preferably less. Employees push the limits of casual day. Delays in IT are part of the daily employee banter and associated eye-rolling. Customer Service isn’t. Managers gather off-site to rate the staff and discuss financial cutbacks, and they strategically attempt to deflect blame. But no one stops to consider that the staff, the product, and the work effort most often reflect the attitude, the personality, and the drive of those who lead. Was the original business model to be inefficient, late to market, and mired in the lack of creative solutions? To employ a workforce of unmotivated task zombies? Many organizations are mired in poor performance and little vision. It does not have to be yours.

There is an answer. Your organization can achieve more!

* * *
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You can escape the status quo by being the very best right where you are. To be the very best, you have to look, act, and sell like the very best.

You may not believe that you are in sales. You may think that salespeople are those pests calling you on the phone, bugging you at the mall, and deceiving you at the car lot. You may not even like salespeople, and you attempt to dodge all interaction with them. You may tire of their “May I help you” when you know they actually mean “Can you help me by buying this?”

But whatever your work space (cubicle, counter, driver’s seat, corner office), whatever your action (customer service rep, cook, driver, coach, programmer, manager, business owner), whatever your goals (more money, status, recognition, security), and whatever your hopes ... you are selling yourself every day, in every encounter.

Unknowingly, you may be selling mediocrity. You may be selling a lack of interest and passion or a critical attitude. Whether you believe, intend, or want to ... you are selling. Every day, every meeting, every casual encounter with upper management, every interaction with fellow employees, customers, delivery people ... you are selling. Whether you are a business owner, hourly employee, entrepreneur, jobseeker, doctor, new employee, or tenured employee ... you are selling.

Of course it’s not fair. There were no classes in school on selling. You studied accounting, programming, business, or maybe even psychology. Your company has not sent you to sales seminars, training courses, or even recommended a book on sales. Your employer is busy teaching you how to do a task, a procedure, a
Escaping the Status Quo

responsibility, a service, a report, a reoccurring set of mundane activities. And you have responded, perhaps even excelled . . . there in your achievement center or behind that counter. But no one has taught you how to sell yourself.

Never fear, the news is GOOD! Here is the secret. Stop and look around. All of those cubicles have people doing their daily tasks, hoping for a 2 percent increase in pay, who just like you simply do not realize they are selling. They are consumed with their daily routine and responsibilities. They are selling mediocrity, without knowing that they have control over their own future. They are successfully selling that they are exactly where they belong.

There is an old joke about a couple of hikers on a forest trail. Suddenly a hungry bear spots them in the path. Recognizing the danger, the hikers turn to escape. One hiker stops and fumbles through their backpack, frantic to put on a pair of running shoes. The other hiker stops to look back and yells, “What are you doing? Even with those athletic shoes, you will never outrun the bear.” The track-shoed hiker responds, “I don’t have to outrun the bear. I simply have to outrun you!”

Now you know whom you will be competing with for your next opportunity . . . the people around you. They may be your friends and coworkers. But they are also your competition to a better position, more status, more money, a better office, or whatever your goals and hopes are. You will not betray them by positioning yourself and achieving more. You betray yourself by accepting their standards. If you act like your competition, talk like your competition, look like your competition, have the same attitude as your competition, then guess how you will be viewed in comparison to your competition?
How are you selling yourself? Have you succumbed to the philosophies and negative examples that surround you? The reality is that we are not dramatically different in degrees of intelligence or competence. We are more often victims of our own expectations and efforts. We sell ourselves short. A Gallop study published in July 2011 revealed that only 27 percent of U.S. workers are engaged with their employment.¹

“Engaged” means actively committed. Only 27 percent. For you, this should be good news. The competition is small.

A popular word used to describe the 73 percent majority of today’s workforce is “disengaged.” It’s an interesting way to describe someone—detached, disconnected, cut off. Who wants to spend the majority of their waking hours that way? Why would people consciously choose to be disengaged? Don’t fall into the same trap others are in. You are the driver of your success. You can do better!

This book’s goal is to help you learn how to better sell yourself. You can become more. Whatever your goals or circumstances, people will notice a change. It is not about bragging, talking louder, or being a jerk. It is about illustrating how good you actually are, regardless of your past history, age, economic condition, or your hardships. Whatever your definition of success is, if you want to become indispensable, your success will be determined by action, commitment, and effort.

Most people are satisfied with mediocrity. Let that sink in. Most people are satisfied with mediocrity. They may want more, but they are not willing to challenge themselves and escape the valley of mediocrity.
Those stuck in mediocrity have accepted their roles and given up. Excuses are easier than honestly looking within. Excuses are trial balloons that we send up, checking to see if anyone is accepting. When our excuses are not challenged and they are accepted by those around us, then those excuses start to develop our self-view of our internal worth, and over time that view becomes a reality. The white flag comes out . . . we have surrendered. We have become the disengaged. We live in the valley of mediocrity.

Success, happiness, attitude, and effort are all choices. Your choice. In this life, everyone will face hardships, bad news, health issues, unforeseen obstacles, insults, bias, and other devastating events. Everyone. How people react to these moments in time is what separates the successful from the trapped. The reaction you have to any issue is your choice. You can choose to be depressed, to give up, and to assume that all is against you. You can also choose to fight through it, to survive, to excel, to smile, to beat the odds, to believe. You can choose to be passionate with your life. Even if you do not yet know what your life’s mission will ultimately be, now is the time to prepare to become indispensable.

This does not mean that you will not face obstacles or that you will win every difficulty. It means you do not have to be defined by the difficulty. You do not have to give fear the authority to dictate your future. Something or someone is going to direct your future. Why not make it you?

Becoming indispensable is not easy. Most folks will quit before they begin. Others will give up along the way. Some will deny they need to change. But the people who are all talk and full of excuses are easy competition to those determined to achieve more.

Are you willing to become indispensable?
You have probably seen Olympic athletes visualize their maneuvers, strategies, and races. Visualization is a powerful tool. It provides them with a rehearsal in their brain for what they are about to do with their body. After visualizing a spectacular performance, they replay live the performance they have already seen.

Visualization will work for you too.

What if you spent time considering what you will do tomorrow, what you will say, how you will act, what you will wear, where you will go, how you will position yourself? Visualize yourself being successful and indispensable. Think about it: How would the most successful people you know look, act, speak, and interact with those around you? Visualize how they would respond when they are faced with a difficult challenge. What if you mentally practiced handling situations similarly—that is, with a positive attitude and manner?

What would happen is . . . you would be better prepared for anything that could happen. As you read this book, visualize yourself incorporating changes in your life. Think about how you will interact with others in various situations and how you will maintain a positive and dynamic attitude.

The first step to becoming indispensable is to see yourself as that person and to act as though you are indispensable already. Beginning today, act on your positive vision and begin separating yourself from your competition.