

Seth Godin's *Linchpin*: An Unsettling Call to Be Indispensable

Growing up I learned a great deal about how things worked in the physical world from working outdoors with my father. Most days we would have at least a few hours to work on our property using a bright orange Kubota tractor. My job was linchpin keeper. If you change a part in the machine, you have to make sure you replace the linchpins or the whole thing will eventually fall apart. Seth Godin's latest book is entitled *Linchpin*. A linchpin is indispensable and this title instantly made sense to me.

Linchpin is his 12th book. This one impacted me almost as much as his ninth book *The Dip*. In his most recent book, *Tribes*, he encouraged us to lead. In *Linchpin* he goes further, pleading with the reader to be the indispensable member of a tribe.

In our society linchpins are those individuals that hold things together. Yes, organizations might succeed or thrive for a while without them, but eventually as pressure is applied and structures are tested, things will fall apart. Mr. Godin clearly illustrates that we are in a critical time of history. The age of cogs and factories worked for a while, but everything has changed. A new breed of worker and leader are now required. We need linchpins to solve our problems, keep us connected, and inspire us with art. People who are linchpins are creative, good at connecting with others, and able to see solutions like no one else. They truly are indispensable.

As Seth Godin explains this concept to his readers, he turns their minds upside down in order to convince them that they are in some way capable of being one. It can be a bit disconcerting that he refrains from handing us a roadmap, since we are a society reared on self help books. Instead, he explains how we got here, criticizing the public education system for creating cogs to fill factories and consumers to buy what they produce. He quotes Woodrow Wilson in his argument that we get exactly what we focus on. In the end we wind-up with drones that do what they are told.

There is no shortage of pundits today that criticize the flaws of our education system, but few will offer a solution. He challenges teachers to inspire student to think instead of follow rulebooks and ace tests. He even goes as far as telling us to give ourselves a D for the rut we have fallen into.

In his chapter titled The Resistance he leaves the reader very unsettled and challenged to no longer be ruled by anxieties and everything that holds us into complacency. Throughout the book I could not help but reflect on the story told in the movie *Apollo 13*. Three linchpins stand out, each one indispensable to the mission. Astronaut Ken Mattingly puts away his frustration from being pulled from the mission to spend hours in the simulator to solve a problem and bring his

friends home. Nasa Engineer and master innovator John Aaron works endlessly with Mattingly. In the film Gene Kranz played by Ed Harris makes the ultimate call for his linchpins to do what they do best, "Let's work the problem people. Let's not make things worse by guessing." We love stories like this because we don't really grow up hoping to be conveyor belt operators or stuck in cubicles doing meaningless work. We dream of changing our world.

Linchpin could be Mr. Godin's greatest work so far. He treats the subject with history and sociology as well as a compelling mix of fact, story and philosophy. Using examples that will both shock and inspire, *Linchpin* leaves you feeling like you have no choice but to reassess your current situation and make the changes he so eloquently urges us toward.