



INSUBORDINATE

by Seth Godin

INSUBORDINATE

Linchpins Everywhere You Look (vol 1.)

by Seth Godin



This ebook is a personal addendum to my book [*Linchpin*](#).

It's about linchpins I've had the pleasure (the joy) to know and work with over the last twenty-five years or so. I've left out far more than I could include.

I hope that after you read *Linchpin*, you'll find that this short ebook makes it even more real. Doesn't matter where you were born or what your job title is, the act of becoming indispensable is available to you.

The amazing (but not surprising) thing is just how unrare these people are (I'm not going to denigrate them by using the word *common*). Everywhere you look, you'll discover people who have some of these traits, some of the time.

The trick is having the will and the love to push yourself to do it as often as these people do. Right here and right now, the ability to be insubordinate when it matters is a critical one.

Thanks for reading.

Seth

Quick bio to get us started:

I started my first real business in 1976, when I was sixteen. I ran a large student-run business in college. Went to business school in 1982 and started my first job in 1983.

Along the way, twenty seven years into this thing they call my career, I've figured out that there are three kinds of people:

Linchpins

Supporters

Leeches, Advocates for the Devil, and Bystanders (aka people in a pre-linchpin state)

I lump the last three together as one kind, because I don't think they deserve categories of their own. Even though they're the majority in terms of numbers, they don't matter so much in terms of getting things done.

The first group, the Linchpins, are the people who make a difference, the ones that ship, the rare ones that truly have an impact. This group of people, in that moment of time, change everything.

The second group, the Supporters, are eager and willing to help. They respect and admire the work the linchpin is doing, and they're ready to supply leverage or money or just a smile to help get the job done. Even better, they challenge the linchpin to do more, dig deeper and make an

even bigger difference.

The third group, as you've probably guessed, are the pessimists, the obstructionists and the protectors of the status quo. Driven largely by fear, they set out to slow you down, whittle you down and average you down. Mostly, it's not their fault, though, because they've been brainwashed and don't yet realized how powerful and productive it is to take a different route.

It's tempting to call these people out by name and to demonstrate how their fear is robbing so many people of a chance to make a difference. I won't, though, because it's not productive. People don't end up in this third group because they choose to be there... they end up here because the lizard brain is so freaked out and the resistance is so loud that they really don't have any choice.

What I do is mentally affix a red "L" (for leech) to their forehead and then, for as long as I can, avoid them. Like a pothole in an otherwise smooth road, it's just easier to drive around them.

At the same time, I feel sorry for them. They are in this group because of fear, not by choice. They wrestle every day with overwhelming feelings of impending doom. Fortunately, it's not a permanent condition.

• • •

The opportunities to make change are bigger and more attractive than ever before. Our leverage is more easily available, cheaper and more powerful too.

Our job as linchpins, then, is to lead the way, to organize and connect people so they can

overcome the resistance and actually do something with the huge advantages our society has given us. If you're reading this on a Kindle or a laptop or an iPhone, it's pretty clear that you're literate, intelligent and by almost any measure, rich.

What are you going to do with that headstart?

Acknowledgements

I usually leave this part for the end, because most readers couldn't care less. However, this entire book is basically an acknowledgment, a thank you to some of the people who made a difference or who leverage those that do.

This book isn't complete, far from it. I left out far more people than I included. But if you see yourself here (either by name or in attitude), all I can say is thank you.

This book is for you and about you. It's dedicated to my dad and my mom, who made such a huge impact on everything I do and believe.

David Seuss

David was my very first boss, bless his crazy soul. At Spinnaker Software in 1983, David led a team of 30 (soon to be hundreds) that developed and marketed the very first generation of educational computer games. And his distinction: *David liked apparent risk*. He thrived on it.

Apparent risk is different from actual risk. Apparent risk is when you launch stuff quickly, challenge the status quo, play with packaging or pricing or distribution, and do it with abandon. It's not actual risk, because in a fast-moving market, the risky thing to do is to play it safe.

Spinnaker raised more than \$10 million from VCs and institutions like Harvard. That seems risky. We launched brands like Michael Crichton, Ray Bradbury and Fisher Price into computer games. We put products into Radio Shack and Lechmere and Target... long before anyone else was even paying attention. All of these risks are what the market demanded. They feel risky when you do them, but in fact, it's precisely what's required to succeed.

One day I walked into the office to discover that Dick Bratt, head of engineering, had bought 30 or 40 German workstations. These were high-end compiling minicomputers, and they cost something like \$15,000 *each*. This was insane. And it was brilliant, because it allowed us to code and compile products faster and cheaper than anyone else in the industry. It allowed us to be the first company to put interesting music in our products. At one point, we were shipping five versions of each new product simultaneously.

As a result of David's bias for shipping, we failed a lot. Products got returned. Commodore 64 computers would groan in pain as they tried to run software that was a little too advanced for their puny brains. It didn't matter, because we were running so fast that the successes supported us far more than the failures slowed us down.

At one point, the board of directors cancelled the entire brand I was responsible for. Five products, months of work, my entire career, gone, over.

I had flown in on the red eye the night before, been told about the cancellation in the morning and then sat down at my 128k Mac and started typing. I was twenty-four years old, I had bet everything on this job and they had just cancelled all of it. I stayed through the night, redesigning every one of the packages, redoing the marketing plan, recreating the spreadsheets and basically doing about five months work in 22 hours. The next morning, David saw my output and unilaterally reinstated the project. He bet his job and his company to indulge his penchant for apparent risk.

That was the beginning of a long journey for me. The last three weeks before ship date (if we missed Christmas with these projects, the company was going to go bankrupt), forty of us stayed in the office every day and every night, sleeping on the floor and coding 20 hours a day. We made the deadline and ending up shipping millions of dollars of software on time (well, sort of on time. We set up a road block for the UPS guy, plying him with champagne to buy us five extra minutes on the last day so we could get the last box on the truck.)

I guess the lesson here is a question: if you were Harvard or one of those VCs, is David the sort

of CEO you would like to invest in? Or would you be better off with a calm, polite, spreadsheet-following numbers cruncher?

Becky Allen

Becky was the art director at Spinnaker's ad agency. Ad agencies usually spend their time isolated from their clients, dreaming up big ideas that live in magazines and on TV. That's how they get paid.

Spinnaker ended up hiring Becky to do all of our packaging as well. Instead of looking for a template and cranking out high-cost, high-gloss work, Becky dove deep into it. We went to science fiction conventions and hung out with crazy Star Trek fans. We met with Ivy Hill, the company that made LP record albums for most of the music industry and worked with them to figure out how to make packaging that no one else would be willing to produce.

At every turn, Becky asked two questions, "How do we make this *more*" and "What's true to the story." We didn't average it out or dull it down. To use the words of Walt Disney, we plussed it. Becky was a supporter. She didn't always invent the art, but she pushed those around her to make the art magical.

Even in the days before computers, when redoing something meant redoing it, line by line, letter by letter, Becky pushed to go to the edges.

The cool thing about reckless abandon is that there is always time to be sensible later.

Steve Dennis

My first business partner was hired for the same job I was on the same day. They couldn't decide between us, so they hired both of us, without informing either. We both showed up, and without meeting each other first, we were chosen to run a tiny student-run business in college, a business that was failing and only 12 weeks old.

Steve had no reckless abandon. He didn't even have an unusual appetite for apparent risk. What Steve knew how to do was balance the facts and figures of reality with the upsides and options of dreams.

Often, people with access to the facts use them to amplify the fear in those around them. Facts speak loudly, numbers louder still. If you want to slow things down or average things out, facts are your best friend.

Steve never did that. Instead, he used his innate skills at finance to figure out how to make dreams come true. At TSR we launched a new business every ten days, and ended up employing about 10% of the student body at one point. We created a snack bar, a birthday cake service, a temporary employment agency that paid great wages and even a failed laundry service.

Steve figured out how to listen to crazy people and use the facts to make those dreams happen. That's the sort of person it's difficult to live without.

Chip Conley

You may have heard of Chip. He runs the largest chain of independent hotels in California, and he's a successful author as well. I'm more interested in something he demonstrated when we went to business school together.

I was the second youngest person in my business school class, and the jocks and superstars who had spent a few years at a commercial bank or other job before school didn't hesitate to let me know how unqualified I was to be there. The first week was really tough.

On the fifth or sixth day, though, I went to my mailbox and found a hand-written note from Chip. We'd never met, it said, but he had heard that I was an interesting guy, and he wondered if I was interested in joining his brainstorming group. We'd meet Tuesday at a conference room in the anthropology department. It was a like a blind date, but I went.

Every Tuesday for the rest of that year, five of us met, usually from five pm to ten pm. We'd spend five hours brainstorming new business ideas, often a hundred or more per session. The brainstorming skills proved invaluable to me, but the lesson I will never forget is a simple one: no one told Chip to do this. No one gave him authority or permission. He just did it.

Initiative is a rare skill, and thus a valuable one.

It's so easy to read this riff, nod your head and go on. But stop for a second. If you had been in that situation, first week of business school, would you have taken the time and initiative to set

up a group like this? For the five of us, it transformed our entire business school curriculum and experience. It was literally life changing. And it was easy to do.

And yet no one did this, no one but Chip.

Jacqueline Novogratz

Do you have a hero? Mine is named Jacqueline.

Jacqueline Novogratz is the founder of Acumen Fund, a groundbreaking non-profit that invests in entrepreneurs in the developing world. These companies end up employing hundreds or thousands of people and make a profit by engaging the poorest people on earth in trade. Trade not aid creates a positive cycle, one that promises to cure deep-seated chasms of poverty.

It took vision to do this, and Jacqueline's vision revolves around dignity. Her ability to treat everyone with respect, and to see how that respect manifests itself in daily life is extraordinary. And her ability to stick with that vision takes guts.

There's no manual for how to do this, no instruction book, no advanced degree. There are people more qualified on paper to build Acumen Fund, but no one with the heart and soul and vision to do it. The rare skill of being able to see a future and then stick with it until it occurs is available to all of us but chosen by very few.

Once again, we see an example of someone who didn't wait for permission, didn't seek out an advanced degree or years of work in a bureaucracy that would guarantee competency, didn't see the end of the road before she took a first step.

Linchpins make change happen. That's the job description. Change that isn't written down, step

by step, change that isn't guaranteed to work. There is a scarcity of people willing to do this, which is precisely why it's valuable.

Lisa Gansky

Lisa helped invent the internet as we know it. With Tim O'Reilly and Dale Dougherty, both key players to this day, she co-developed the first commercial website (GNN), acquired one of the first search engines (Webcrawler) and then helped sell both to one of the first bubble success stories (AOL). After that she co-developed Ofoto, the guys who figured out how to do photo albums and printing online. And the list goes on.

None of that matters except that Lisa also understands people. She understands the power of connection and leadership and humanity. While others run around building up the biggest LinkedIn network they can, Lisa builds trust. While others are worrying about flipping this company or buying that one, Lisa has consistently focused on how her actions will impact other people.

When I was running Yoyodyne, I flew to Berkeley for a thirty minute meeting with Lisa to discuss how we might work together on a promotion. Four hours later, I was still in her office. We ended up launching the first million dollar promotion on the internet, awarding a fork lift operator in Idaho a million bucks and generating a bazillion clicks, all in 1996 or 1997 (I can't even remember any longer), long before most people were even online.

The thing I will never forget about that meeting is how much Lisa pulled out of me. I went in with a pretty good idea and we ended up with a great one. Lisa never treated the meeting like a sales call, she turned it into a revival meeting. There were guest appearances by her sales people,

her technical people, her project management people. Lisa used the meeting to do her job... not to say no, but to produce something remarkable.

What happens when you do that over and over again?

What will you do during your next sales call?

Lynn Gordon

In a world of make-believe artists, Lynn actually is one.

You've probably seen a deck of her "52" cards. Each card has a funky illustration on one side with facts and games on the other. You can buy decks about museums, Valentine's day or science. I'm told that her publisher has sold millions and millions of decks.

Lynn doesn't do the illustration, but she's still an artist. She's an artist because of the way she sees the world, because of her desire (and ability) to put existing things together in a new way. Before she invented the decks, playing cards were already around. So were illustrations and how-to books. The idea of putting all three together, and doing it with flair and imagination, is the work of an artist.

When I first met Lynn in 1985, she was playing with fabric. The thing about making bags or clothes is that it's *all* been done before. Because of that, you don't worry so much about startling originality. Instead, the goal is to create a reaction, to generate emotion, to provide usefulness or a connection. You're not going to make a diaper bag or a scarf or a blouse that has never existed before. What you might do, though, is create a juxtaposition that generates a reaction, that touches an emotion.

Combine this with a lack of compromise and a drive to ship, and you have the makings of art.

Shepard Fairey

Shepard is the most famous fine artist of this century. Of course you've seen his Hope poster, the one that hangs in the National Portrait Gallery and helped elect a president.

How did a graffiti artist who plays with stickers and Xerox machines end up with a one man show at the Warhol Museum?

I'd argue that his understanding of art as a gift is at the heart of his success. Paintings, of course, have a long history of being free to look at. You go to a museum and you can see priceless art. For free or close to free. The artists don't care. In fact, they work hard to be there.

So why give it away?

Give it away because there's an imbalance of trade. Give it away because attention is priceless. Give it away because that's what art is... a gift.

When you do a personal act, a human act, and change someone else for the better, then you're an artist.

Chris Anderson

When Chris Anderson took over Wired magazine, no one was particularly blown away by the news. Most of us hadn't heard of him. After *The Long Tail* and *Free*, though, all of us have.

What's his secret?

Chris brings data to bear on hunches.

Plenty of people have hunches.
A few people have data.

Very few people are both innovative and patient enough to combine the two in a practical way.

In my book *Unleashing the Ideavirus*, I talked about Zipf's Law and the power curve (I focused on the wrong part, though, the short head). It took Chris's brilliance to bring so many case studies to bear that even the skeptics understood the power of the Long Tail and how it was going to revolutionize what they produced and how they marketed it. Being first wasn't the key. Being right was.

Chris has a process. Most artists do. He refines it, he uses it widely, he's clear about what the process is.

In order to do the kind of work he does, you must be promiscuous. You can't have a secret and

then magically launch it, because without the help of the community, you can't get the data you need. So Chris shares, often with abandon. The sharing engages, it enthralls and it spreads the word. By the time the idea is fully baked, the rest of us are ready and eager to hear what he has to say.

Many people are (almost) as smart as Chris. Few of those people, though, work as hard to see the world as it is. Few are as rigorous and fewer still are willing to engage a community in a shared quest to find the answer, regardless of who gets the credit.

Jerry Shereshewsky

Jerry was VP of marketing at my first internet startup, Yoyodyne. He was also a one-man tornado, a rift in the time-space continuum, someone who was able to bend reality at will.

Usually, we equate marketing guys with people who do advertising. Too bad for Jerry, we never did a dollar's worth of advertising at Yoyodyne. And so Jerry used other tools.

The key insight here is this: honest enthusiasm is worth more than a gross rating point or a billboard.

Jerry brought (and continues to bring, in one project after another) honest enthusiasm to his work and then pushes hard to make it contagious. The idea that enthusiasm is some sort of virus is groundbreaking. Jerry proved that when one person communicates positive energy to another, it spreads.

This isn't safe, of course. The lizard brain hates people who go out on a limb, people who aren't cynical or ironic. The resistance would prefer it if you would sit quietly and just observe.

Of course, observers are easy to replace.

Margery Mandell

Margery was my first real employee. I had worked with other people (some of whom were really good at doing what I asked) but Margery made change happen--she relentlessly pushed me to grow my company, raise the stakes and get better at what I did.

That bias for growth is a common trait among linchpins.

Not necessarily growth in terms of people in the office or even profit. Growth in terms of new frontiers, new challenges, new ways to fail.

Margery regularly reminded me that it was okay to fail, pushed the company to launch products that might fail, and, since I'm telling the truth, demanded that we bring her enough juicy things to do every day that we really had no choice but to push the envelope.

Years later she came back to join us at Yoyodyne and did the same thing again.

“What’s next? Why not?” [taps foot impatiently].

A bias for growth is something you see in the best artists. And finding someone to amplify your own bias is a good idea.

Steve Lewers

When Steve was at book publisher Houghton Mifflin, he published many of my books, including the *Information Please Business Almanac* and several *Guerrilla Marketing* books.

What struck me about Steve was the complementary skills of a long-term view and centered calm and confidence.

He published books bigger and riskier than some publishers, but he made them work. Dictionaries, almanacs, books that took years to produce. He succeeded not because he created a bunch of hoopla or noise or took irrational bets. He succeeded because he understood the power of dripping quality, bit by bit, day by day.

The original almanac in his catalog had been in print for forty years and yet it still paid off every day. Creating a new, specialty almanac wasn't easy, it was an opportunity that scared off most would-be competitors, but he knew that he had the time and resources to do it right and make it pay.

And just as important, when confronted with this opportunity, he took it.

Steve had the long-term view that's so rare today. As a result, he outpaced just about everyone else, turning in earnings that dwarfed those that were always in a sprint.

Bob Miller

Don't Sweat the Small Stuff. That's not just a motto, it's the name of a series of books developed by Bob a few decades ago. As a book publisher, Bob has been in the center of a series of innovations that could only be produced by a linchpin.

For example, after the first Small Stuff book became a hit, most people in publishing would have published a sequel or two and moved on. Bob saw the power of the brand and turned the title into a mini-industry, publishing dozens of versions and formats and once again inventing a new publishing approach.

In my research, a key attribute in a linchpin is the ability to see the world as it is. If you want to make change that matters, this is critical. Without seeing the territory and understanding the levers that are available to you, you can't coherently plan an alternate future. Time and time again, Bob demonstrates his ability to see his business as it is.

Virtually everyone else in publishing is intuitive, taking things on faith and seeking to maintain the status quo. When change hits, they don't know what to do, because they can't see the landscape.

The new thing might not work. It certainly won't be an unqualified hit without adjustment, but that's the entire point. The opportunity is in learning faster and more coherently than others, which gives you the chance to innovate again and again.

Jerry Colonna & Fred Wilson

In 1995, most people didn't have an email address. A few were playing with the world wide web. And two guys in New York were busy investing tens of millions of dollars in web startups.

In hindsight, even a lucky fool could have made money with this strategy (in fact, a few did, and most of them blew it shortly thereafter). But Jerry and Fred weren't lucky. And they certainly aren't fools. Instead, they saw something others didn't, *and* they had the guts and initiative to act on it.

Boy, that sounds easy. It's not.

Anyone could have done it. Anyone didn't. They did.

Take a look around at today's world. Some people (right here, right now) are doing things that anyone could do, but no one else is. Those people are linchpins, and I'm glad they're hard at work.

Chris Meyer

Chris is a consultant and thinker working at the Monitor Group in Boston. For years, he has seen the world as a system, an interconnected series of ventures, evolving algorithms, natural laws, people and technologies. He's written books about this, but more important, he's done it, he's been there, he's worked with the people who are making huge changes in our economy.

If you're running a huge bank or considering how new ideas are going to upend your chemical company, you could call Chris. Or you could spend months trying to find someone else who knows how to think the way he does.

The way you think, the way you approach problems, the way you interact with opportunities-- these are enough, all by themselves to make you indispensable.

It's entirely possible that Chris is smarter than you (he's smarter than me, that's for sure). What's also entirely possible, though, is that you have domain knowledge and insight in a different field that you can amplify and leverage enough that others will gladly pay you to share it with them.

Alan Webber and Bill Taylor

Right when the Internet was on the cusp and *Wired* magazine was getting started in chronicling technology, Alan and Bill left the *Harvard Business Review* with some very big ideas about how business might evolve.

“Something is happening and it affects us all. A global revolution is changing business, and business is changing the world.”

They wrote that in November 1995, fifteen years ago. The amazing thing is that they were right. They were chronicling and in fact, creating a movement. The magazine they built didn't react, it instigated. Instead of starting out with an expensive junket called a retreat, they ran a cheap one and called it an advance.

Here's what they wrote on the cover of the first issue. Let me know if it sounds like the work of two crazy guys who can see the future:

“Work is personal, Computing is social, Knowledge is power, Break the rules.”

The two of them, from the very start, were evangelists. They had a vision, they articulated it and and they worked (hard) to change people. By all of my definitions, they were artists.

They found talent, they told stories and they changed lives. Many of the books you read and the

companies you work for wouldn't exist if it weren't for two focused people with the leverage to change the world. And they did it on purpose. They set out with an intentional plan and they pushed it until it worked.

Sure, it was a good business. Mostly, it was an important one.

Angela Kapp

Is the cosmetic industry serious?

I mean, fashion journalism are a joke. Fashion writing is inane. The pricing is ludicrous, the stories are hardly transparent and the people seem interchangeable. And yet...

And yet Angela Kapp sees how it all fits together. She's held a senior position at one of the largest cosmetic companies in the world for years. Lots of people say they want to have leverage and influence in an industry that seems fun. But Angela does.

She understands personalities, technologies and markets. She doesn't drink the FlavorAde, but she's not afraid to serve it if it advances her vision of where the market can go. Angela understands that she doesn't need to run the company to have fun with it.

Deep down, Angela sees and understands the industry, but she realizes that this is insufficient. She also realizes that if she doesn't cause change to happen, the industry will just walk right by.

Mark Hurst

I hired Mark from a small ad I ran in *Wired* magazine in 1993 or so. There was a lot that made him different from the other applications I got: Eagle Scout, MIT grad, major in games. Yoyodyne was one of the first companies hoping to do games online, and his background was ideal.

The reason I hired him, though, is that he had a point of view.

We spent more than a year arguing. Good-natured positive discussions about who we were interacting with and what we were offering. We argued about the business, not about each other.

Mark didn't want to be told what to do, and I didn't want to tell him, so it was a great combination. No, that's not the best way to carve out a twenty-year career at one company, but, tell the truth, what is? If you work for a company that promises you stability for a generation, you can bet the company is going to fold.

Better to enjoy the ride. Mark left before the company really hit its stride, off to do his own thing. And that choice led him down an even better path.

Subordination is overrated. They hardly have a word for it. Insubordination is the place to be.

Robert Gehorsam

In 1988, no one you know had heard of the Internet. Yet Robert Gehorsam was already hard at work at Prodigy, the online service that invented so many of the features we take for granted today.

Robert isn't a computer scientist, and he's not really a marketer either. What Robert did was take a hard look at the landscape, understanding who was involved and what the systems were capable of. He saw that he needed to please three partners (IBM, Sears and CBS) that were about as big as companies could get. He saw that the infrastructure at Prodigy was unwieldy at best. And he realized that if he just repurposed magazines or other flat content, he'd fail.

The insight that Robert demonstrated back when no one knew what they were doing was that it was okay to not know what you were doing. When everyone else was playing it safe, Robert was willing to take lots of controlled risks. He understood that if he failed while no one was looking, it didn't count as a failure. He understood that reaching out to people with big ideas was a lot easier and safer than it looked. And he understood that creating a tiny team of people that cycled new ideas quickly was a recipe for building a factory that made change.

At one point, Robert's tiny team at Prodigy accounted for more of the company's traffic and user retention than other divisions that were literally fifty times bigger. He didn't do it with flash or histrionics. He quietly made change and then scaled it.

If you wait to do what you're told, it's way too late.

Dan Pink

When Dan wrote the “Free Agent Nation” article for *Fast Company*, people thought he was nuts. When he switched gears and wrote a book about how your brain works at work, they wondered aloud. And when he created a manga cartoon about job hunting, they weren’t wondering any more, they were sure.

It’s comically easy to find a freelance writer today. A good one might cost you a little more than a lift ticket at Aspen. But a big thinker, someone willing to be crazy (and then proven right) over and over again... that’s a whole different animal.

The great lesson of Dan Pink is that you don’t have to have his genetic make-up to do what he does. You need to do endless research, push yourself to do plenty of analysis and then have the courage of your convictions to actually make it happen.

These three easy steps are all it takes to be a linchpin.

Tom Schnibbe

Is there a how-to book on how to run a service station?

Apparently, over the years, the secret has been to sell Slurpees, stay open late and make the gas as cheap as possible. Of course, it's not much of a secret, because unless you own a lot of stations, it's a meager living, with high turnover and not much job satisfaction either.

Tom decided to be human instead.

He remembers your name. Smiles when you pull in. And if you get your car serviced (which a lot of people do... why go to a dealer who sneers at you?), Tom will probably insist on delivering it to your house or going the extra mile to make the thing run right.

People whine and say that service is dead. They're wrong. What's dead is our appreciation of service and a willingness to pay for it. Sure, some people like Tom come along and insist, but I believe that every society gets the artists it deserves. The act of appreciating the extraordinary belongs to us, the customers, and the more we do it, the more we'll get.

Jay Levinson

Guerrilla Marketing is one of the seminal marketing ideas of our generation. How'd that happen?

Daily creativity combined with relentless persistence.

Jay came from advertising and knew how to write. So he wrote. And he knew how to market, so he took a few clients to pay the bills as he developed his career as a writer. Jay wrote books about making money without a job and yes, even about satellite television long before anyone had ever heard of it.

Key takeaway: he didn't wait to be appointed. He was a professional who happened to be on a path to write books. And so he wrote. No one called up Jay and said, "we need you to write this book." No, he just wrote it.

And after *Guerrilla Marketing* became a minor hit, he worked to make it a major hit. He found Steve Lewers (see above) and the two of them realized that there was room for more than one or two or ten books in the series. So they turned it from a book into a movement.

Jay isn't a natural public speaker, but he persisted and he got good at it. And he created a platform that made it easy to find talented co-writers (he and I did three books together years ago) that kept the ball rolling.

Once again, another linchpin who didn't wait to be told the step-by-step instructions. Instead, he saw a future and he made it real.

Jo Ann McGrath

Jo Ann teaches biology in a public school. She's in the union. She has a job. There are work rules and school rules and state rules.

Big deal.

Jo Ann has never used the rules as an excuse to do less. Instead, she uses them as a framework to allow her to do more. Student by student, year by year, she makes a personal connection with teenagers and changes them.

They walk into her classroom believing in magic, embracing ignorance and unready to contribute to a rational society. They leave understanding what science means.

Can you imagine the impact that this teacher has had over the last twenty years? Thousands of people now contribute to our society because Jo Ann refuses to settle. She views her job as an opportunity, not a paycheck. Why not?

Tom Peters

Twenty five years ago, my life (and yours, too, probably) was changed by Tom and Bob Waterman's book, *In Search of Excellence*. After that, on a regular basis, Tom has provided us with shots of brilliance and unsettling reminders that we've got a long way to go to reach our potential as organizations and individuals.

Along the way, there's a question that's been nibbled at but never really answered. I mean, I know many of the 687 ways to create excellence, the do's of excellence and the imperatives of excellence, but what is it, really?

At first, organizations got excited about the formula excellence = quality. If we can meet spec, regularly and on budget, we win.

But the quality mantra only takes you so far. Is my water company excellent? Every time I turn on the tap, water comes out. The bills aren't outrageous. I never need to call them. Are they excellent? Or boring?

What about ConEd or the other boring commodity providers in my life? By my definition, once you start providing a commodity that your customers treat as a commodity, you're no longer excellent.

Here's my take:

Excellence means that you're indispensable. At least right now, in this moment, there's no one else I would choose but you. You, the excellent one, are so surprising, so delightful, so over-the-top and yes, so human that there really isn't anyone else I'd rather dance with.

The 'in the moment' nature of excellence makes it a moving target. JetBlue was excellent, for a while, but then others started catching up and new management started slowing down. Suddenly, it wasn't a JetBlue flight any more, it was just a flight. Easy to switch to Virgin Atlantic or someone else.

Excellence isn't about meeting the spec, it's about *setting* the spec. It defines what the consumer sees as quality right this minute, and tomorrow, if you're good, you'll reset that expectation again.

The surefire way to achieve excellence, then, is not to create a written spec and match it. The surefire way is to be human. To be artistic. To make a connection with the customer and to somehow change them for the better. The reason Tom and I and others can continue to write about excellence twenty-five years later is that we're not writing about business at all. We're writing about people.

When the Ritz-Carlton hotel empowers every employee from manager to chambermaid to "make things right," they're not engaging in the sort of quality control most managers are comfortable with. In fact, if they were able to write down exactly what to do in every situation, the excellence factor would disappear. What the hotel accomplishes with its policy is this: they challenge their employees to become artists.

Tom Peters is an artist. There's no other way to describe the man and his career. He has never done what he was supposed to do, never followed the manual. He flies a bazillion miles a year when he no longer has to. He creates Powerpoint slides that others sneer at. Doesn't matter. He's on a mission.

The art of connection, the art of being human, the art of making a difference. Artists do things that have never been done before. They dig deep to create passion. They connect by changing things for the better.

The economy has been better, and the economy has been worse. Through it all, the market seeks out, recognized and embraces artists, people we can't live without. That's our opportunity right now.

To be excellent means you must be an artist.

You

I saved the last example in this ebook for you. Of course you're a linchpin (at least occasionally). Of course you're a genius (when the time is right). You're insubordinate when you want to be and creative when you need to be.

Now your job is figuring out how to do that more often.

Please, go ahead and share this with whomever you like (but don't change it or charge for it).

And if you can, buy a copy of [*Linchpin*](#) and give it to someone who will appreciate it. Thanks.