

# CHAPTER 1

## First, Understand Why You Need to Be Indispensable

The victory of success will be half won when you learn the secret of putting out more than is expected in all that you do. Make yourself so valuable in your work that eventually you will become indispensable.

Og Mandino

**T**he first step toward becoming indispensable is to understand what the word *indispensable* means and why it is so important to your career. One definition of indispensable is “absolutely necessary.” This is not the definition used in this book. I constantly remind managers that everyone is expendable, including themselves. No one individual employee is absolutely necessary for a company to survive. It would not be much of a company if that were the case. A real company must be able to survive even after losing key employees at the highest level. Most people hardly notice when even the most charismatic leaders and talented managers leave their

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posts. Rudy Giuliani was so adored by the residents of New York City that they tried to change the law so that he could remain mayor for a third term. Even though Mayor Giuliani's successor did not have Giuliani's charisma, the lives of most New York City residents went on as usual after Giuliani's departure. The same thing happened when Jack Welch retired from General Electric (GE). He is a living legend among managers. People who hear him speak at conferences and conventions treat him like a rock star. Yet life went on as usual for most GE customers and employees after his retirement in 2001.

Another definition of indispensable is "essential," which means something is of the highest importance for achieving a specific goal. This is the definition we used in this book. The purpose of this book is to help you become of the highest importance in your company's achievement of excellence. Your company won't value employees regardless of their caliber if it is content being mediocre. A company needs employees of the highest caliber if it wishes to excel.

Contrary to reports, there's no shortage of labor in the United States today. There are over 225 million people currently in the workforce and over 7 million who are looking for a job. I've never met an employer who advertised a job opening in the newspaper and got no response. The quantity of job applicants isn't the problem; it's the quality. I meet over 10,000 managers every year who are frustrated to the point of hopelessness with the declining quality of the labor pool. There's little doubt that our work ethic is deteriorating. This outlook may be bleak for employers but it presents an incredible opportunity for you. The demand for good employees goes up as the supply goes down. This places you in control of your own destiny.

I want the company to succeed. To do that, we need to get the best people. And if the best people are outside Ford, we will go after them. Or we'll grow them up from inside.

Bill Ford Jr., CEO, Ford Motor Company

## Companies Don't Need Employees; They Need Good Employees

Payroll is the biggest single expense for most companies. This makes employees their biggest investment, which is why the personnel department has now become the *human resources* department. No business can survive if it doesn't get a good rate of return on its biggest investment.

Although there is no one single employee companies can't live without, there is a category of employees companies can't live without if they are to excel. You must become part of that category if you wish to be indispensable. Being a good employee doesn't make you indispensable; it only makes you valuable. Companies need good employees but hope and pray for indispensable employees. You must be better than good in order to be considered indispensable. This doesn't mean you have to be extraordinary; few of us are. I divide employees into three categories: the highly valued employee, the run-of-the-mill employee, and the lowly valued employee. You must become a highly valued employee if you wish to become indispensable.

Begin by making an honest assessment of your situation. Ask yourself if you're presently a highly valued employee, run-of-the-mill employee, or lowly valued employee. Be brutally honest when you answer this question. If you're not already a highly valued employee, your journey to becoming one begins now. If you're already a highly valued employee, this book will help you maintain that status and become even more valuable.

The kind of people I look for . . . are the guys who try to do more than they're expected to do.

Lee Iacocca

## There's No Such Thing as Job Security

Detective J. J. Bittenbinder spent 23 years with the Chicago Police Department and is widely respected as one of America's leading

authorities on personal safety. He teaches people that they can't prevent being the victim of a violent crime. What they can do is make themselves a less attractive target. Detective Bittenbinder teaches people to make themselves the last target a criminal would choose. This is the approach you must take to job security. You can't prevent your company from shutting down or laying you off, but you can make yourself one of the last employees your company would choose to let go. This ensures that you will always have a job as long as your company has a position you're capable of filling. While at GE, Jack Welch was a huge proponent of an employee performance evaluation system called *forced rankings*. This method systematically eliminates employees who are ranked in the bottom 10 percent. Similar systems have been used by Ford, Goodyear, and EDS. The percentage of employees ranked in the bottom or elimination category varies by company. What doesn't vary is that keeping yourself in the top category is the surest way to keep your job. Don't look to your employer for job security because no company can give this to you. You must create your own job security by making yourself a highly valued employee.

The biggest mistake that you can make is to believe that you're working for somebody else. Job security is gone. The driving force of a career must come from the individual. Remember: Jobs are owned by the company, you own your career.

Earl Nightingale

## Money Is Not the Root of All Evil

The first step toward becoming a highly valued employee is clarifying your purpose for working in the first place. It sounds obvious but some people have trouble with this. The vast majority of us work for money. People often say that money is the root of all evil, believing that they are quoting the Bible. This is an inaccurate quote and it's also untrue. The Bible says that *the love of money* is the root of all evil.<sup>1</sup> It's how we handle money that can cause problems. Disagreement over money causes more marital problems than religion, in-laws, or infidelity.

We need money and there's nothing wrong with being well paid for a job well done. Billy Graham's salary was reported at \$174,000 for the year 2000. The first official salary for a president of the United States was \$25,000 a year in 1789. George Washington declined to accept it even though it was an enormous sum at the time. Bill Clinton's presidential salary was \$200,000 a year when he left office in January 2001. George W. Bush began at a salary of \$400,000 a year when he took office that same month. Few would argue that each of these men earned every penny they were paid and then some. Bill Gates has given away nearly \$30 billion through the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. I challenge anyone who thinks that money is evil to tell it to the thousands of children whose lives have been saved because of the medical treatments made possible through the Gates' philanthropy.

I also challenge anyone who thinks that money is evil to try living without it. Money is neither good nor bad. It is simply a necessity. Most of what you'll ever want to do requires money. Whether it's sending your kids to college, feeding the homeless, or buying a new Jaguar convertible, you need money to do it.

Even those who work for a higher calling agree that having more money frees them up to do more of what matters most. Larry King interviewed Rick Warren and asked how money has changed his life. Pastor Warren's book *The Purpose Driven Life*<sup>2</sup> has now sold an estimated 20 million copies and made him one very wealthy pastor. It still didn't change his life very much. He remained in the same house, kept driving the same car, repaid his salary for the past 20 years to his church, and now gives away 90 percent of his income. He continues to pastor at Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California, but with one minor change. He now works for free. He explained that the money didn't change his life but made it possible for him to change thousands of other people's lives.

Wanting to make the most out of the 40 hours or more you put into work every week doesn't make you greedy, materialistic, or selfish. It makes you wise. If you've got to work, why not make it count? There's nothing wrong with wanting to stay where you are if you're content and able to meet your financial obligations. There's also nothing inherently wrong with wanting to make more money.

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If you ask me to name the proudest distinction of Americans, I would choose . . . the fact that they were the people who created the phrase “to make money.” No other language or nation had ever used these words before. . . . Americans were the first to understand that wealth has to be created.

Ayn Rand, Author of *Atlas Shrugged*<sup>3</sup>

### Conclusion

The first step to becoming indispensable is understanding *why* you need to be indispensable. Becoming indispensable to your employer is the only way to achieve job security. It is also the only way to advance. Making more money is a perfectly acceptable reason to strive to be a highly valued employee because:

- Everyone needs money.
- The surest way to get money is to work.
- The surest way to get more money is to become more valuable at work.