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Book Review – *The Art of Being Indispensable at Work: Win Influence, Beat Overcommitment, and Get the Right Things Done*

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With new technology, constant change, uncertainty, and virtual teams, getting things done at work is tougher and more complex than ever. Finding your place amid the collaboration revolution working with everyone across silos and various platforms can feel like we are in a no-win cycle in urban Extension environments. However, there is always the indispensable go-to person, or in our case organization—urban Extension, that thrives on many working relationships, maintains a positive attitude of service, demonstrates creativity and tenacity, and strives to get the right things done. This review will share information on how urban Extension professionals can continue to behave differently, building up influence with others by not trying to do everything for everybody but by doing the right things at the right times for the right reasons.

Keywords: indispensable, urban, focus, work, Extension

The Art of Being Indispensable at Work: Win Influence, Beat Overcommitment, and Get the Right Things Done was written by Bruce Tulgan to help you succeed in today’s increasingly demanding and uncertain world of work (Tulgan, 2019). It is a practical guide for navigating through constantly shifting priorities and unclear lines of authority. It is about how to think and conduct yourself when so many factors are outside your control. It is simple and provides practical tips and strategies that can be used by Extension and other professionals, especially in urban environments.

As the world of work continues to change and evolve, finding your place in an organization and achieving success has become more blurred and less defined. Traditional structures have been broken down or removed, hierarchies have flattened, and personal leadership is needed more than ever. Having an entrepreneurial approach to your job appears to be vital for success but comes with a less-traveled path and direction. However, getting the right things done lends itself to being indispensable at work, which has become even more accelerated in Extension, especially in urban environments. In this book review, I will share insights to help navigate the path to being indispensable at work and application to Extension as an indispensable go-to organization.

Fighting Overcommitment Syndrome

Nobody can do everything for everybody without succumbing to overcommitment. Stretching oneself beyond capacity is where priorities get muddled, and important things are left undone or

done ineffectively. Navigating these relationships to avoid over-commitment is now our job. In urban Extension, this applies as we are forced to manage directly many more working relationships than before. The relationships are with a much wider range of colleagues and a greater diversity of positions, many without clear lines of authority—up, down, sideways, and diagonal. All of these relationships have the intent to support each other better to produce a more fluid and flexible program in a faster, more untraditional method.

Tulgan shares a few ways we all can handle and manage overcommitment:

- You can NOT ever do everything for everybody.
- You must make choices about what you are NOT going to do so you get the right things done.
- You can't be great at everything, so you need to build a repertoire of specialties you are known for consistently doing very well and very fast.

Having Real Influence

The long game of real influence is a generous, other-centered focus based on adding value in every single interaction. This is hard to do, but in turn, the value you add can make the other person more valuable; contributes to more successful and fruitful interactions and outcomes; and builds your reputation as a true servant to others. Serving others is the essence or heart of Extension work. In urban environments, because of sheer size and numbers, this is often difficult but can be achievable and adds value to others in every interaction. However, this doesn't mean doing whatever our colleagues or others want at the moment; it does mean trying to do what we think will ultimately make everything go better for everybody. Real influence is incredibly valuable, but it must be earned.

Leading From Where You Are

With the rise of self-managed teams and the thinning of management ranks, going in the right direction is to lead up, down, sideways, and diagonally—from wherever you are right now. Whether or not you are in command, take charge. In Extension, this is so true. While there are many missions to lead or follow, Extension professionals take charge both personally and organizationally, even without a title for that leadership. This leadership is often referred to as having an entrepreneurial mindset that aligns locally with state, regional, and national priorities.

Master the “No”

Saying “No” at work is a way to prevent you and your colleagues from wasting time, attention, money, and other resources. “No” is how we try to protect ourselves from making bad commitments that are not allowed (against the rules), should not be done (not a priority), or cannot be done (not possible). Saying “Yes” is often seen as the easier thing to do but should be

limited to those items that can be done within a person's time allotment. In Extension, saying "Yes" is a common practice because we like to be all things to all people. There are so many good things to do that saying "No" doesn't seem like a viable option. However, saying "No" can help balance and focus our Extension work.

Finish What You Start

In a collaboration revolution workplace, where authority and priorities are often unclear, people often manage multiple responsibilities. We all say this as if it is a badge of honor or that we are proud of being very busy with lots of important work. However, the busier you are and the heavier your workload, the less you can afford to manage multiple responsibilities. It will usually be a matter of time before deadlines get missed. The reality is you can only finish one thing at a time. Extension work, especially in an urban environment, often appears as a juggling act or a normal way of doing business. However, our goal is not to juggle until somehow, eventually, we complete a task or project. The goal is to finish what you start. Remember to accomplish this by creating a "DO" list, not a "TO-DO" list.

Go-to-ism ... The Art of Being Indispensable at Work

Go-to-ism is "the way of the go-to person." It is both a philosophy of work and a way of conducting yourself at work. It is how you think and what you do. It is the long game of serving others and making yourself valuable to the people around you by building goodwill and a positive reputation. Go-to people don't do everything for everybody or one person. They approach every relationship determined to add value to every interaction and every other person. Extension professionals excel at being the go-to person or the go-to organization. However, in the new world of work, Extension can look at new ways of doing their work, especially in urban environments, and truly become or master the art of being indispensable at work individually and overall an indispensable organization.

Conclusion

This game-changing yet practical book reveals the secrets of the go-to person in our new world of work. Based on an intensive study of people at all levels in all kinds of organizations, Tulgan shows how go-to people think and behave differently. They build up their influence with others—not by trying to do everything for everybody but by doing the right things at the right times for the right reasons, regardless of whether they have the formal authority. Extension professionals can directly apply this information both personally and organizationally to ensure continued success and relevance in the future as urban environments continue to grow and get more complex.

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Resources

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