

Welcome Mid-May!

After a mostly grey and windy April, we were relieved to have some sunshine, earlier this month. And then, in the context of Fort McMurray's wildfire disaster, came some much needed rain! And while we've returned to cold and grey weather again, sunshine is forecasted for the weekend--just in time to help you beautify your surroundings, whether you're sowing an acreage or preparing a balcony flower pot.

Last month, I featured pointers from newsletter guru Michael Katz on ways to secure clients for solo entrepreneurs. I also visited an article on ways to avoid burnout by Jason Selk and checked in with etymologist Bryan Garner on how to use correctly the word "otherwise." Thanks to those of you who wrote in, with your responses.

Since I have lately met new entrepreneurs who have asked me about favourite books, I return in this issue to a blog posting (from four years ago) foregrounding the arguments of marketing genius Seth Godin, in his best-selling classic, *Linchpin: Are you Indispensable*. I also visit Lindsey Pollak on why to examine LinkedIn's publishing platform--advice you may appreciate, if you take on Godin's thinking. I also cite American grammar specialist Bryan Garner on the difference between the expressions, "toe the line" and "toe the mark." (just in time for bare feet weather?!)

Enjoy this issue and the beauty of spring. And whether it's that pot of flowers or a farm you're cultivating, please appreciate the gifts of nature, in these all-too-fleeting months!

Sincerely,

Elizabeth

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Think You're Not Creative? Revisiting Seth Godin's *Linchpin: Are you Indispensable* (Revisiting a blog from April, 2012) . . .

American guru Seth Godin has written some of the most powerful and persuasive arguments on marketing ever penned. But their interdisciplinary relevance reaches beyond such a designation and has earned him the reputation of being a contemporary thought leader. Godin's analysis of the psychology of entrepreneurship and, in particular, how to be a "linchpin" (or creative genius), in any business climate, continue to influence me.

In today's column, I revisit an April, 2012 blog posting, reminding us of Godin's analysis that we all have genius to offer, from his breakthrough book, *Linchpin: Are you Indispensable?* (2010). His thoughts (aptly) defy linear cataloging, so here I've digested a few of his arguments and provided examples. In this article, I'm particularly interested in what Godin

means by the concept of the “linchpin” and how every creative person can optimally find and apply their unique genius to become one.

Which of us hasn’t felt insecure at some point, while working on a project or in an organization? One well-masked but common insecurity is the niggling, underlying doubt that “Maybe I’m not smart enough.” Not smart enough to spearhead that million dollar campaign; not smart enough to recruit that world-class candidate; not smart enough to work with that legendarily difficult (billionaire) client . . . and on it goes. When Godin says that achievement in business requires “genius” of us, I can almost hear the groans of creative people’s self-doubt, as if in a painful, collective, Charlie Brown “good grief.” Genius, we think, belongs to other people.

And what is a “linchpin” anyway? You might ask, doesn’t it exclude me, since I’m not a card-carrying member of Mensa? . . . A “linchpin” is a small piece of hardware that keeps a wheel from falling off its axle. It’s “not famous but certainly indispensable,” Godin writes. It’s not necessarily making the most money, or getting the most attention. But it requires “genius” from us. To be a “linchpin” is to leverage internal, not external, resources “to create a position of power and value” (22), where others only subsist.

Godin cites Keith Johnson scouring flea markets across the US to stock a high-end home furnishing store; and David, a baristo at Dean and DeLuca in NYC, who goes out of his way to engage with his coffee-loving customers. Both Godin says are “linchpins.” So too are Nelson Mandela, who changed the world from a jail cell in South Africa; and Cathy Hughes who dropped out of university but became the first black woman running a public company in the U.S.

And it may also be you—working late after your children have gone to bed, to ensure that your presentation tomorrow speaks to both the new hires and the veterans of your association. Or volunteering a weekly shift in your community’s soup kitchen, where you have a gift of connecting with the fragile individuals who visit daily

Godin redefines what he means by the “genius” of work. It’s someone with the ability and “insight to find the not so obvious solution to a problem” he writes. You “don’t need to win a Nobel Prize to be one” he says. And, better yet, “all of us are geniuses sometimes” (1). Godin says that you might find a shortcut others overlook, solve a problem that stumped your family, found a way to make something work that only failed before, or “made a personal connection with someone who was out of reach to everyone else” (1). Isn’t that you? Even once, he asks? You too have genius within you.

Further, he adds that in being a “linchpin,” “it’s not about what you’re born with, it’s about what you do” (28). The only way to “get what you’re worth” is “to stand out, to exert emotional labor, to be seen as indispensable, and to produce interactions that organizations and people care deeply about” (27).

“You’ll earn your place in the market with humanity and leadership,” Godin says. Don’t fear either (13). “In exchange for doing good work for its own sake, linchpins gain freedom, responsibility and respect, which are priceless” (36).

If you make your art (i.e. what many consider their “work”) in only the form of cheap, fast and easy-to-replicate products or services (that disregard real talent), “you’ll find you race to the bottom.” That means dehumanizing your business and lowering prices, ostensibly to compete.

To strive to be a “linchpin” is to face the reality that it’s *no longer* OK to be such a “cog in the wheel,” because the world’s economy no longer fairly compensates people who perform at that level. The chief bottle-washer’s days are over. The “linchpin” is neither bourgeoisie (the “baron of industry”) nor proletariat (who may flip burgers at McDonald’s), but owns the means of production by leveraging his/her own internal resources--like energy and insightfulness. Godin says you needn’t necessarily change jobs to do it-- “almost any job can be humanized or transformed,” he says (52).

To what end are these efforts to be a “linchpin,” you might ask? Godin says that “when you master the communication, concepts and connectivity of a linchpin’s “new” work, then you have more power than management does. And if management attracts, motivates and retains you for your great talent, then it has more leverage than the competition” (24). You also redefine your life.

To be a linchpin: “Be remarkable. Be generous. Create art. Make judgment calls. Connect people and ideas . . . and we have no choice but to reward you” (33). It’s not the intrinsic nature of the painting or the sculpture but “the art and the insight and the bravery of value creation that are rewarded” (53). Living life “without a map requires you to be a linchpin,” he says. But no, it won’t be a cake-walk: no one gets a set of rules for this.

And here’s an injunction of my own: don’t confuse the “linchpin” genius or process with perfectionism (e.g. I try not to freak out when I miss typos in this enewsletter!). Don’t try to be too perfect for your organization or business. Instead, act as a linchpin in doing better, as you learn.

Godin opens his remarkable book with David Mamet’s words: “Do not internalize the industrial model. You are not one of the myriad of interchangeable pieces, but a unique human being, and if you’ve got something to say, say it, and think well of yourself, while you’re learning to say it better.”

So each of us can use our “genius” without having that membership with Mensa. In light of Canada’s recent downturn in the economy and the unstable industries that no longer support it, Godin’s manifesto for “linchpin” work is more relevant now than ever.

Thoughts to share? Write me on the “contact” page of my website (www.elizabethshih.com) And good luck as you succeed as a “linchpin” in your field.

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"Word Nerd's Corner": "Toe the line" or "Tow the line . . .?!"

American etymologist Bryan Garner writes that the phrases "toe the line" and "toe the mark" mean "to conform to the rules; to do one's duty," and that they "come from track-and-field events

in which the contestants were once told to put one foot on the starting line." (The terms have since been replaced with the shout: "On your marks!")

The phrases appear to be Americanisms that originated in the early 19th century.

Especially in the phrase "toe the line," the metaphor is sometimes badly distorted from *toe* to *tow*—e.g.:

“Pressure from such microscopic scrutiny suggests that China will have to *tow* [read *toe*] the line, or world powers will retaliate with trade sanctions.” -- M. Ray Perryman, “Hong Kong Shows How the Child Can Also Be the Parent,” *San Antonio Bus. J.*, 25 July 1997, at 55.

Although he notes that *toe the line* is about five times as common as the variant *toe the mark* in current print sources, Garner says that the latter idiom has not entirely disappeared. For instance, a newspaper article states that “In his latest tape, Osama bin Laden denounced Muslim countries that don’t *toe his mark* as ‘tyrannical and apostate regimes, which are enslaved by America.’” -- Ron Grossman, “Also-Rans Snipe at U.S.,” *Chicago Trib.*, 2 Mar. 2003, Perspective §, at 1.

Have you used "toe the line" or "toe the mark" in your speech or writing? Does Garner's explanation of their history help you to use these idioms properly?

Please send me your usage issues and bugbears on my "contact" page and I'll use them in a future blog or issue!

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"Ask an Expert": Lindsey Pollak on LinkedIn's Publishing Platform . . .

Marketing writer, expert and NY Times bestselling author, Lindsey Pollak, published an article on her own website recently on why LinkedIn is the “hottest publisher of the moment” (<http://www.lindseypollak.com>).

If you’ve let your LinkedIn activity slide for a while and are seeking a platform for building your connections, take note. Pollak writes that the “Publisher” platform on LinkedIn is the largest publication in the world, whose potential readership is 414 million members.

The platform is open to everyone and more than one million people have published posts. LinkedIn offers an unparalleled opportunity to get your voice out in the world without having to commit to developing your own blog and driving traffic, since you’ll have a built-in audience from your existing LinkedIn connections.

Pollak finds that LinkedIn Publisher is one of the network’s most exciting developments for readers and writers and cannot be dismissed as “boring” or “static.”

She argues that LinkedIn can build your career and brand in two ways:

- 1.) It has the most relevant content for you as a reader:

reading relevant industry content from LinkedIn allows you stay current on the insights of leaders in your field. You'll automatically see posts from any of your connections, but you can also choose to follow other thought leaders in your space.

LinkedIn's algorithm will identify leaders in your field, or you can search for an insider whom you may want to invite to speak at your next event.

If you're ready to go beyond reading, then try commenting and sharing influencers' posts. This can put you on the radar of VIPs in your industry.

2.) You can share your views with many:

Producing content is a powerful way to brand your company, and whether you're junior-, mid- or senior-level, Pollak argues that LinkedIn a fantastic forum for building credibility within your company and industry.

Once you've published, your post will live online, even when it disappears from the top of the news feed. Content on LinkedIn consistently ranks high in Google searches, so that it empowers your professional profile.

Pollak says to explore and "make it work for you." Here are her top tips for creating valuable content.

(1) Consider your topics carefully. You want to write about issues that are relevant to your industry, but not overdone.

(2) "Make it personal." Write about what you know best to make it authentic. Use as many stories as you can. Try to read the work of influencers. Contact one of them with some of your work and see if they'll share with their audience, too.

(3) "Short can be sweet." Attention spans on social media tend to be short. So it's fine to share 200 well-chosen words.

(4) "Make it readable." Use bullets and subheadings so that your writing will be easily scanned on mobile devices. "Strive for consistency." Don't just post once and never again.

(5) "Stockpile ideas." When inspiration strikes, take advantage of it. Write three or four posts before publishing, so that you're not always scrambling for content.

(6) Spelling and grammar still count. Be extra careful that your posts "live on and reflect your professional brand." If needed, get a second set of eyes to proof and edit. Hire me (hint, hint)!

(7) Finally, "have some fun!" Pollak recommends experimenting with different formats and ways to promote your posts.

Have you written, read and shared blogs or articles through LinkedIn Publisher? Please share your favorite post (or tips you've learned) on my comments page, [here](#).

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I'd be delighted to continue this conversation.

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Shop News . . .

I recently finished with the first major round of editing the curriculum of the Praxis School of Entrepreneurship, a project managed by the school's CEO and Chief Visionary Officer, Monica Kreuger. Her flexibility when meeting and determining deadlines has helped make this work possible. Special thanks again, Monica, for allowing me the freedom to carry this work alongside other contracts. When the curriculum is revised by facilitators and final proofreading done, I'll be thrilled to see it "get legs!"

I also enjoyed editing what will likely be the last Master's thesis I'll read before the 2016/17 academic year.

Another thanks goes out to business advisor Lori Jestin-Knaus of Women Entrepreneurs of SK, who offers insight, awareness and wisdom through the organization's monthly "mentoring circle." I'm always the better for consultations with Lori. She creates value out of clients' diverse contributions (and digressions). Women Entrepreneurs of SK (which also takes memberships from men, did you know?) offers valuable training and networking opportunities for new or growing entrepreneurs, small- to medium-sized businesses and for those who work as solo professionals.

I'm also delighted to be a guest of the research team of the local Neural Health Project, spearheaded by Integrative Medicine specialist and family physician, Dr. DeeDee Maltman. Supporting new initiatives in mental health care is always something that interests me, so I look forward to preparing some press releases, web copy and social media postings, in upcoming weeks. Special thanks to mentor extraordinaire, Monica Kreuger, for introducing me to DeeDee.

And congratulations go out to artist, businessman and ever supportive mentor, Bob Pitzel (painter and COO, Failure Prevention Services), whose watercolour paintings were recently accepted by Manitoba's Portage Mutual Insurance, to be featured in their 2017 calendar. Assisting Bob with preparing a biographical profile for the calendar was fun, not least since it drew on the full-length biography I wrote on him, for my 2015 ebook, *Getting Past It: Five Creatives Face Adversity*. Bob's extraordinary paintings will look stunning in the calendar. For more information, stay tuned to Bob's website and newsletter, in September.

It was also a pleasure to work with talented writer, editor and web manager, Ashleigh Mattern, on some recent research for "Prairies North." Thanks to her for her expertise and good judgment. I know we'll iron out glitches in future shared projects. To read more about Ashleigh's web design firm, Vireo, that she co-owns with partner and husband Jordan Mears, visit their website.

And, amidst spring (my favourite of all seasons), I continue to work on your writing and editing projects. I'm now taking bookings for September, so please contact me with your ideas and projects!

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About Us . . .

Since 2011, Elizabeth Shih Communications has provided B2B marketing and communications services on the Prairies and across Canada.

Do you need help writing your “marcom” materials? Please contact me through my website, via the CASL-compliant email form, on the right-hand side of each page (www.elizabethshih.com).

After I have received your permission, I’ll be pleased to discuss projects with you!

I help small- and medium-sized businesses and selected non-profits create e-newsletters, blog postings, promotional emails, press releases, case studies and related documents that secure good clients or members. Please visit my website for more information (www.elizabethshih.com).