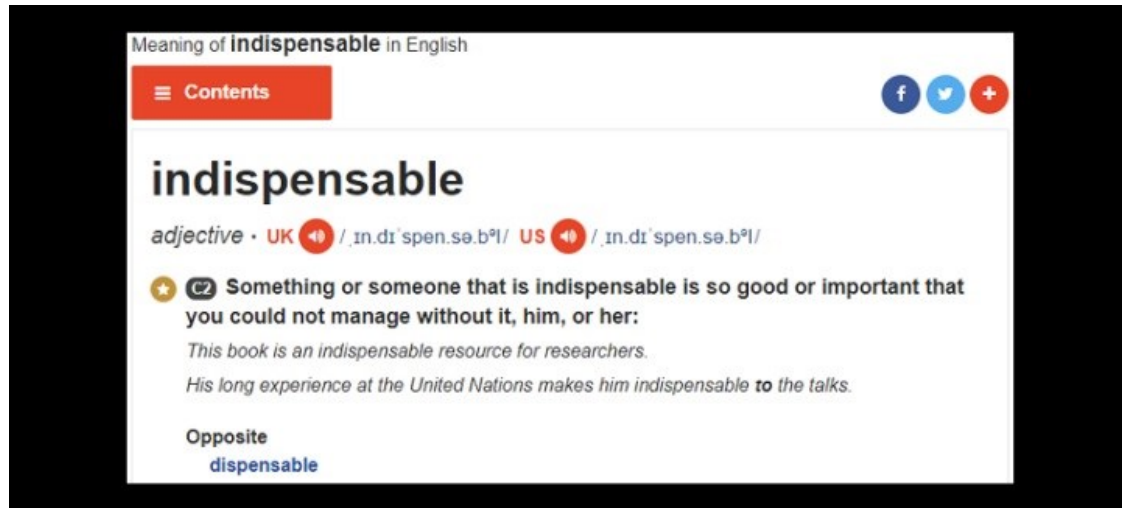


The Suit: Being indispensable

By [Jason Harrison](#), issued by [M&C Saatchi Abel](#)

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Several years ago, a young account manager set up a meeting with me, to have a 'catch-up' [*in our industry, "catch-ups" are a great euphemism for 1) I'm resigning or 2) When am I going to be promoted? Interestingly, catch-ups never seem to be about how I'm doing*].



‘Life dominoes’

This catch-up was different. He came into my office, jittery, highly animated, sweating quite heavily and immediately blurted out that he was planning to get married in five years' time. Yip, he had discussed it with his girlfriend (and his mom) and they all agreed that five years was the proper time to get things lined up and planned properly. Before I could even get a word in, he started working back from their big day, by lining up his metaphorical 'life dominoes' in front of me.

"You see, Jase, before we get married, we need to move into her place to test the waters, but before that we need to see if our cats get on, but before that we need to buy an engagement ring, but before that we need to start a joint saving account for the honeymoon, but before that we both need to earn more money, because I've worked out the costs to get married in five years at a Nett Present Value and I'm not going to be able to make it happen. So, Jase, I need to know when I am going to be promoted to account director?"

There it was, the first domino piece. His promotion. #catchups

Ticked all the boxes

To prove he was worthy of being promoted to an account director, he pulled out the checklist for being an account manager and confidently informed me that he'd ticked all the boxes. (Impossibly, he seemed to be sweating even more now. You could tell his future life depended on this conversation.)

I looked him in the eye and said, "I'm with you, but checking all the boxes is what I pay you for; it's not what I promote you for. Promoting you is about everything you do that is NOT inside a box and that depends on just one word: indispensable. So, you have to answer one question for yourself: what have you done that no one else can do?"

And, just like that, I knocked over the wrong domino of his future life, as he contemplated the horrific reality of having to live alone. With his cats. FOREVER.

Indispensable

Indispensable : Something or someone that is so good or [important](#) that you could not possibly [manage](#) without it, him, or her. — [Cambridge English Dictionary](#).

That one word is the only job spec you should ever need as a suit. Your title is not your job. Your job spec is not your job. If you want to make yourself valuable and a success, your job is to make yourself indispensable.

How?

1. Have a deep well
2. Connect the dots
3. Own your magic

1. Have a deep well

You can't be indispensable if you aren't well-read, across a huge variety of topics. In any conversation or meeting, you need to have an interesting, intriguing or inspiring point of view. That point of view comes from tapping into a very deep well of knowledge, every day, to help solve the problem in the moment. If you can't put two-to-three solutions on the table, then my view is that you lose the right to pass that problem on to others.

2. Connect the dots

Let's be clear: Job bags aren't dots. Timing plans aren't dots. The Loeries doesn't have a category for 'best contact report', because contact reports aren't dots. The best suits have the ability to take seemingly random dots and weave them together into a beautiful story or a unique way of thinking about a problem or to align disparate people together around a common goal. It is a suit's job to see and connect those dots in fresh and relevant ways.

3. Own your magic

When I interview people, I always ask them, "What's your freak flag?" You didn't spend 21 years living and getting educated to come work in an agency to eat the biscuits in meetings. Diversity of thought is the most-powerful tool for solving problems. Bring your madness, your charm, your culture, your sense of humour, your insights, your life to work. Being indispensable means standing out. Fly your freak flag.

If that sounds like hard work, it's because it is. It takes conscious effort and planning. But, in an economy that is ever-spiraling and in an industry that's going through dramatic change, the opposite definition is chilling:

Dispensable : Able to be replaced or done without; superfluous. — [Oxford Dictionaries](#).

PS That account manager never did marry his now ex-girlfriend, but he has become an indispensable suit with a stellar career ahead of him. I count him as one of the very best. He still has his cats, though.

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