



# FROM ASSEMBLY WORKER *to artisan*

By Greg Wiens

It was 1979. I had just announced to my parents that I was leaving my engineer position at General Motors for seminary. I told them I wanted to make an impact with my work during my most effective years, before retirement. Most of all, I wanted a sense of fulfillment. Their response was enthusiastic, but not in a good way.

“Who promised you that you should enjoy your work?” said my father. He told me that if I worked hard at GM, I could retire and then do whatever I liked. “When your family is starving, I’ll feed your kids but not you,” he said in exasperation. It was clear that my paradigm of work was foreign to my parents; they could not understand it. Now, more than 30 years later, I am glad that I left GM. My department there ended up going bankrupt, and my children never became my father’s charity case.

## **NEW ECONOMY, OLD METHODS**

Over the past 30 years, America’s entire economic model has been experiencing its own paradigm shift. Gone are the times of a hard day’s work for a hard day’s pay, when it was enough to simply show up and do the job. Also extinct is the notion of working the same job until retirement, at which point the company would pay your pension until you died.

These fundamental changes have also touched the church, and have drastically affected the way ministry is done. In the past, it was enough for pastors to show up for office hours, visit congregants, and preach a Sunday sermon. Now, pastors are responsible for providing vision and direction, leadership through uncertain times, and plotting a course for the church’s future. Leaders cannot blindly adopt the previous generations’ work model anymore. Times have changed.

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### QUOTES FROM SETH GODIN’S **LINCHPIN:**

*“Artists are people with a genius for finding a new answer, a new connection, or a new way of getting things done. That would be you.”*

*“The competitive advantage the marketplace demands is someone more human, connected, and mature. Someone with passion and energy, capable of seeing things as they are and negotiating multiple priorities ... Flexible in the face of change, resilient in the face of confusion. All of these attributes are choices, not talents, and all of them are available to you.”*

*“Every interaction you have with a coworker or customer is an opportunity to practice the art of interaction. Every product you make represents an opportunity to design something that has never been designed, to create an interaction unlike any other. For a long time, few people were fired for refusing to understand that ... Now, though, it’s not an option.”*

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## FROM COG TO LINCHPIN

Seth Godin's latest book, *Linchpin*, is about adapting to these changes and looking at our work in an entirely new way. During the Industrial Revolution, artisans were replaced with functionaries, hired to do mindless, repetitive tasks in order to increase the efficiency of mass production. The quest to make affordable cars inadvertently sapped the creative energy from the workplace.

The advent of the internet has brought on another revolution. It has spawned a global economy where the manufacturing piecework can be performed faster and cheaper abroad. Stateside, the new model is fueled by emotional labor. The key to survival in this economy is to become invaluable to an organization, not a cog in the wheel, but a linchpin that holds the wheel together.

Godin says that to become a linchpin, find out what kind of artisan you are meant to be, using your innate abilities as indicators. Natural talents that are cultivated and honed will develop into artisanal skills. Finding your uniquely suited niche role requires thinking on your own rather than letting others do it for you. This will be different for every person, and can be unsettling because it feels risky. Godin calls this avoidance of risk our "lizard brain", which is bent on seeking familiarity and comfort, and will always prevent you from stepping out and taking a chance.

Godin is not opposed to working at large corporations; he is opposed to working mindlessly at large corporations. He gives many illustrations of people at large companies who continue to be artisans in their normal workday. Artisans work thoughtfully, do not stop at the job description, and have a spirit of serving others.

This last attribute is a function of what Godin calls "the gift economy" in which participants must learn to give everything away freely. Give smiles to people without expecting them in return. Serve others who cannot serve you back. Perform your responsibilities better than what was paid for them. In doing so, benefits from these "gifts" will come back to you in many different ways.

## THE CHRISTIAN LINCHPIN

I was struck by how much of the language in *Linchpin*, a secular book, parallels scripture in its description of people as members of a body, and its principles of how we should approach our work. The principles found in *Linchpin*, if taken seriously, could be very freeing for the church. Pastors could be free from being copycats of the latest Christian bestseller or mega-church pastor. Church members could discover that their unique contribution to the Kingdom is rooted in an

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### MORE QUOTES FROM LINCHPIN:

*"When people realize they are not a cog in a machine, an easily replaceable commodity, they take the challenge and grow. They produce more than you pay them to, because you are paying them with something worth more than money. They do more than they're paid to, on their own, because they value quality for its own sake, and they want to do good work. They need to do good work. Anything less feels intellectually dishonest, and like a waste of time."*

*"When you do emotional labor, you benefit. Not just the company, not just your boss, but you."*

*"The act of giving someone a smile, of connecting to a human, of taking initiative, of being surprising, of being creative, of putting on a show—these are things that we do for free all our lives. And then we get to work and we expect to merely do what we're told and get paid for it. This gulf creates tension. If you reserve your emotional labor for when you are off duty, but you work all the time, you are deprived of the joy you get when you do this labor."*

*"Being open is art. Making a connection when it's not a part of your job is a gift. You can say your lines and get away with it, or you can touch someone and make a difference in their lives forever. This is risky and it's impossible to demand of someone. The decision to commit the act is a personal one, a gift from the heart."*

*"If art is a human connection that causes someone to change his mind, then you are an artist."*

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understanding of their God-given abilities. Churches could stay relevant in reaching the lost and not get bogged down by the traditions of past generations.

Young leaders will take more readily to Godin's analysis. Too often however, seasoned pastors' "lizard brains" scare them back into the comfort of the familiar and the tried, to the detriment of the Kingdom of God and their own vitality in the Spirit.

After reading this book, I realized why my work ethic was so different from my father's. It was not that I was unwilling to work hard, but rather I was unwilling to work hard for something I did not feel passionate about. I now realize that I was being prepared by God to be effective in the new ministry paradigm long before the old one had died. At the time, this dissonance created some tension in my life and in the church, but now I am completely comfortable with the new state of things.

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### ***Linchpin: Are You Indispensable?***

**By Seth Godin**

**Portfolio Hardcover, 256 pp., \$25.95**

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**FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT GREG WIENS, PLEASE VISIT  
[WWW.LEADERSTHATLAST.ORG](http://WWW.LEADERSTHATLAST.ORG)**

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#### **MORE QUOTES FROM LINCHPIN:**

***"One way to become creative is to discipline yourself to generate bad ideas. The worse the better. Do it a lot and magically you'll discover that some good ones slip through."***

***"Art is the product of emotional labor. If it's easy and risk free, it's unlikely that it's art."***

***"The job is what you do when you are told what to do. The job is showing up at the factory, following instructions, meeting spec, and being managed. Your art is what you do when no one can tell you exactly how to do it. Your art is the act of taking personal responsibility, challenging the status quo, and changing people. I call the process of going your art "the work". It's possible to have a job and do the work, too. In fact, that's how you become a lynchpin."***

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