

Last updated: 18:03 (GMT+04) Monday, November 03, 2008. Dhu l-Qa'da 5, 1429.



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The myth of indispensabilityBy Carole Spiers, Special to Gulf News
Published: October 13, 2008, 23:28

As the credit crunch worsens, bringing a huge element of uncertainty to businesses around the globe, you may imagine that a stress consultant, like me, must be prepared for a good deal of crisis counselling to people feeling the impact of financial uncertainty.

If I tried to detail all the stress-signals that I can see looming up, it would fill most of the pages of *Gulf News*!

But sometimes you can detect one particular word, repeated like an alarm-signal that reveals a stress-factor requiring attention. The one word I always hear in times like these, is "indispensable". It just seems to be part of the vocabulary of organisational change.

A company needs to shed staff and a lot of the more responsible and dependable employees start to believe that they are indispensable and will be unaffected. They cannot imagine their department surviving without them. Sometimes an unscrupulous employer may try to coax more work out of them by making such a flattering suggestion. But more often, it is a self-deluding mix of vanity, loyalty and disbelief.

The feeling of indispensability has, in fact, quite a lot to do with the psychological "need to be needed", that is to say insecurity, and this unfortunately shows up many times in those of only average talent.

Not managing

Once I was giving a series of lectures on organisational change at a small private airfield in the North of England, which was being upgraded into a local passenger terminal. I found, however, that I was having to counsel the catering manager, who insisted that he could handle the transition from serving a couple of dozen meals an hour to delivering at least a hundred, or more.

As the demand accelerated, he had found himself working in a robotic manner, incapable of taking a ten-minute break because the feeling of indispensability was so strong. I could see that mentally and emotionally he wasn't managing, and persuaded him to go for a medical check-up, which confirmed that he was probably heading for a complete breakdown.

He took two months out, and came back as deputy manager - a happier and more balanced individual, who found time to

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play golf a couple of afternoons a week. He found he wasn't so indispensable after all!

Wise managers have always declared that everyone, in the final analysis, is dispensable.

At such times of change, you need to be able to countenance radical shifts in custom and practice, or as we say, "think outside the box" in order to gain real situation perspective.

If you happen to be one of those who can view the current problems with suitable detachment, let go of personal baggage and apply creative imagination in finding a solution - then you may, become a little less dispensable than before.

- The writer is a BBC broadcaster and motivational speaker, with 20 years experience as CEO of Carole Spiers Group, an international stress consultancy based in London.

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