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# What is an effective leader?

If you Google the word leader, you get more than 300 million hits. On Amazon, there are 480,881 books today whose topics have to do with leaders. It doesn't help to go to Wikipedia to get a clearer definition because, right off the bat, 11 different types of leaders are named, from bureaucratic to transformational, to laissez-faire. In the field of leadership, there are as many opinions as there are writers, and there is also a lack of common language and tools. So it's no wonder that if you ask any roomful of leaders or potential leaders what effective leaders need to be, know, or do, you get as many answers as there are people in the room.

We believe that it is time to bring together decades of theorizing about leadership: we need to simplify and synthesize rather than generate more complexity and confusion.



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> From the body of interviews we conducted, we concluded that 60 to 70% of leadership effectiveness would be revealed in a code – if we could crack it! Synthesizing the data, the interviews, and our own research and experience, we emerged with a framework that we simply call the Leadership Code, made up of The Five Rules of Leadership. These make up leadership DNA.

## The five rules of leadership



### Shape the future

This rule is embodied in the strategist dimension of the leader. Strategists answer the question, “Where are we going?” and they make sure that those around them understand the direction as well. They figure out where the organization needs to go to succeed; they test these ideas pragmatically against current resources (money, people, organizational capabilities); and they work with others to figure out how to get from the present to the desired future. Strategists have a vision about the future and are able to position their organizations to create and respond to that future. The rules for strategists are about creating, defining, and delivering principles of what can be.

### Make things happen

Turn what you know into what you do. The executor dimension of the leader focuses on the question, “How will we make sure we get to where we are going?” Executors translate strategy into action and put the systems in place for others to do the same. Executors understand how to make change happen, assign accountability, know which key decisions to take and which to delegate, and make sure that teams work well together. They keep promises to multiple stakeholders. The rules for executors revolve around discipline for getting things done and the technical expertise to get the right things, done right.

### Engage today’s talent

Leaders who optimize talent answer the question, “Who goes with us on our business journey?” Talent managers know how to identify, build, and engage talent to get results now. They identify what skills are required, draw talent to their organizations, engage these people, communicate extensively, and ensure that employees turn in their best efforts. Talent managers generate intense personal, professional, and organizational loyalty. The rules for talent managers center on resolutions that help people develop themselves for the good of the organization.

### Build the next generation

Leaders who are human capital developers answer the question, “Who stays and sustains the organization for the next generation?” Talent managers ensure shorter-term results through people, while human capital developers ensure that the organization has the longer-term competencies required for future strategic success; they ensure that the organization will outlive any single individual. Just as good parents invest in helping their children succeed, human capital developers help future leaders be successful. Throughout the organization, they build a workforce plan focused on future talent, understand how to develop that talent, and help employees see their future careers within the company. Human capital developers install rules that demonstrate a pledge to building the next generation of talent.

### Invest in yourself

At the heart of the Leadership Code – literally and figuratively – is personal proficiency. Effective leaders cannot be reduced to what they know or what they do. Who they are as human beings has everything to do with how much they can accomplish with and through other people. Leaders are learners: from success, failure, assignments, books, classes, people, and life itself. Passionate about their beliefs and interests, they expend enormous personal energy on and give great attention to whatever matters to them. Effective leaders inspire loyalty and goodwill in others because they themselves act with integrity and trust. Decisive and impassioned, they are capable of bold and courageous moves. Confident in their ability to deal with situations as they arise, they can tolerate ambiguity.

Over the last few years that we have worked with these five rules of leadership, we have come to some summary observations:

All leaders must excel at personal proficiency. Without the foundation of trust and credibility, you cannot ask others to follow you. While individuals may have different styles (introvert/extrovert, intuitive/sensing, etc.), an individual leader must be seen as having personal proficiency to engage followers. This is probably the toughest of the five domains to train and some individuals are naturally more capable than others. All leaders must have one towering strength. Most successful leaders assume at least one of the five roles in which they excel and most are personally predisposed to one of the five areas. These are the signature strengths of your leaders.

Each leader must be at least average in his or her ‘weaker’ leadership domains. It is possible to train someone to learn how to be strategic, execute, manage talent, and develop future talent. There are behaviours and skills in each domain that can be identified, developed, and mastered. Leaders must be able to grow. The higher up the organization that the leader rises, the more he or she needs to develop excellence in more than one of the five domains.