The Leadership Code
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There are thousands of books, studies, models, etc. on the topic of leadership. The authors, while perhaps not discovering so many new solutions to becoming a great leader, have set out to find the essentials of great leadership and crystallized those essentials into five rules.

According to the authors, “We have examined the broad field, talked in depth with the smartest leadership people we know, and passed all that information through the screen of our own hundred years of experience in the field. Through the process, we have discovered and validated what we now know to be the five essential rules all leaders must follow.”

The authors highlight the rules as follows:

RULE 1: SHAPE THE FUTURE
The four most important business issues that we hear about over and over again from our clients are globalization, innovation, speed to market and leading a diverse and changing workforce…all in the face of the greatest economic downturn since the 1930s. Meeting these issues head-on requires strategic leadership. Strategic leadership requires embedding technical and organizational capability throughout the organization in order to delight customers and investors better than competitors. Strategic thinking is often delegated upward to the CEO or senior management team. But strategic traction comes when employees at all levels of the company not only understand where the company is going, but are excited by it, and know what to do to make it happen in their day-to-day decisions.

RULE 2: MAKE THINGS HAPPEN
In most organizations, execution work happens on teams because customer requirements, as well as organizations, are simply too complex for any one person to deliver against needs. Excellence in execution, then, depends on excellent teams. Teams bring people with different skills and abilities to work toward a common goal, thereby inviting a variety of perspectives, and encouraging new idea approaches and renewed commitment. The team’s collective commitment can progress the agenda of the organization.

RULE 3: ENGAGE TODAY’S TALENT
A talent manager gets important things done in a short period of time in a way that builds engagement and community within the team. People in organizations need to work together collectively toward a common goal, and at the same time they need to be able to express who they are individually. They need to approach the market and customers as one voice, and yet they need to be able to speak up as individuals. People need to work in an aligned direction, and they need to connect to the organization’s purpose in a very personal way. Making these paradoxes work is a key skill in managing talent.

RULE 4: BUILD THE NEXT GENERATION
Having networks and relationships are important both inside and outside the organization we work in. As a leader, you can help foster a supportive community of colleagues where people work together in the moment, but also have an emotional tie to the organization. Communities of practice, for example, are especially helpful in attracting and retaining talented women and other historic minorities since they have traditionally lacked networks that can help them advance in corporations. Leaders who are human capital developers realize the importance of building a workforce that can deliver results today but also have a plan and process to develop or acquire the technical and social competencies relevant to our future strategic needs.
RULE 5: INVEST IN YOURSELF
Personal proficiency is the ultimate rule of leadership, and it starts by knowing yourself. If you are not grounded through your values and beliefs, credible through your judgment, emotionally mature through your ability to analyze yourself and connect with others, and willing to learn and grow as a leader, you will not be prepared to be a strategist, executor, talent manager, or human developer. Who you are becomes a predictor of what you can help others to become. When you have personal insights into yourself, you will be able to lead others. We call this broad leadership rule personal proficiency because it is about you and your personal qualifications to lead others. Personal proficiency comes from knowing your predispositions, strengths and weaknesses.

This is an excellent, practical and thoughtful guide to leadership thinking. In a time when we have seen how the lack of competent leadership has impacted our society, this book provides pragmatic advice that can be put to work today.