



◆ AN EXECUTIVE INSIGHT GUIDE

The LeaderCode™

The Six Leadership Behaviors of Success™

BY

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*Powering Business Performance **Through Talent***

Leadership is not short on ideas. It is short on a shared definition

The LeaderCode™ is a shared leadership framework designed to give organizations one consistent, observable definition of successful leadership. Rather than using different competency models for managers, directors, and executives, it creates a common leadership language whose expectations increase as a leader's responsibility grows.

THE CORE FRAMEWORK • THREE CONNECTED ELEMENTS

01 Leadership Foundation

WHAT MUST I BRING TO LEADERSHIP?

Every leader operates from the same foundation: Know Your Role, Lead Yourself, and Work With Others. These practices establish credibility, self-awareness, discipline, trust, relationships, and sound judgment. Leaders never “graduate” from this foundation; its application simply becomes more complex as responsibility increases.

02 Six Leadership Behaviors of Success

WHAT SHOULD PEOPLE EXPERIENCE?

Purpose • Direction • Capability • Accountability • Engagement • Results

These behaviors are interdependent, not a sequential checklist. Purpose without Direction can inspire without focus; Direction without Capability can create plans people cannot execute; Accountability without Engagement can produce compliance rather than commitment; and Results achieved at the expense of the other behaviors may not be sustainable.

03 Leadership Ladder

AT WHAT LEVEL OF RESPONSIBILITY?

The same behaviors scale across three levels: Leading Individuals, where results are created through a team; Leading Leaders, where results come through developing leaders and integrating work across groups; and Leading the Enterprise, where leaders shape strategy, investment, resources, culture, organizational capability, and long-term performance. The level is determined by the work and scope of responsibility—not the job title.

From framework to operating model

A shared standard is worth more than another leadership-development program.

The LeaderCode is intended to become more than a leadership-development program. A shared standard can inform selection, success profiles, onboarding, coaching, performance, succession, development, and leadership measurement. TalentWise™ organizes application around three capabilities: Insight to see leadership patterns clearly, Development to translate insight into focused practice, and Advisory to apply the framework to real business decisions.

Development focuses on observable behavior rather than personality or intention: locate the work, assess the current pattern, select one or two priorities, define observable actions, practice them in real situations, review the evidence, and repeat. Success should ultimately be measured through participation → application → impact, including changes in behavior, employee experience, retention, and relevant business outcomes.

BOTTOM LINE

The central proposition is simple: organizations do not necessarily need another leadership model—they need one shared, observable standard that scales with responsibility. The LeaderCode seeks to make successful leadership easier to recognize, assess, develop, and reinforce while still allowing leaders to have different personalities and styles. As AI changes the mechanics of work, the framework argues that human leadership remains essential because leaders remain accountable for creating meaning, exercising judgment, building trust, and owning outcomes.

The behaviors remain recognizable; the standard rises with the responsibility.

What this guide covers, and who it is for

A shared leadership framework for defining, developing, and scaling successful leadership.

A practical overview for CEOs, CHROs, CPOs, and executive teams that want one common leadership language with expectations that rise as responsibility grows. Built from twenty-five years of operating, coaching, and advisory experience across enterprise, growth, and transformation environments.

INSIDE THIS GUIDE

A concise view of the complete system. This guide previews the architecture developed in the book *The LeaderCode* and shows how the various parts support a connected leadership operating model inside an organization.

THE PROBLEM	THE FRAMEWORK	THE APPLICATION	THE CONTEXT
Why disconnected leadership languages create ambiguity in assessment, development, performance, and succession conversations.	How the Leadership Foundation, Six Leadership Behaviors of Success, and the Leadership Ladder work together as one system.	How a shared code can inform insight, development, coaching, selection, onboarding, performance, succession, and everyday leadership decisions.	Why human leadership remains essential as artificial intelligence changes the mechanics, speed, and structure of work.

The full book develops the Foundation, each behavior, the transitions between levels, and the practices that move leadership insight into sustained application.

How to use this guide: read it once from beginning to end, then use it as a shared reference for assessment, development, coaching, selection, onboarding, performance, and succession conversations.

Why I built this framework

Leadership is not short on ideas. It is short on a shared definition that leaders can use consistently.

Throughout my career, I have paid close attention to how leadership is experienced in practice: how leaders create clarity, respond under pressure, develop people, make trade-offs, and translate intention into results. Across industries, geographies, and business conditions, the context changed, but the strongest patterns remained recognizable.

That observation eventually became The LeaderCode. The framework does not suggest that there is only one personality or style capable of leading well. It identifies a common set of expectations that people should be able to experience from successful leadership, while recognizing that the way those expectations are applied must change as responsibility grows.

Many organizations unintentionally make leadership harder by introducing one vocabulary for new managers, another for directors, and still another for executives. Each program may be useful on its own, yet the combined effect is often fragmentation. Leaders repeatedly learn new labels instead of deepening a stable set of behaviors.

The LeaderCode offers a more connected approach: a Leadership Foundation, Six Leadership Behaviors of Success, and a three-level Leadership Ladder. Together, those parts create a practical way to define leadership, discuss it with greater precision, and connect development to the work a leader is actually responsible for performing.

THE PREMISE

One common code should not make every leader look the same. It should make successful leadership easier to recognize while allowing the application to adapt to the situation and level of responsibility.

The problem leaders are not naming

Fragmented leadership languages create inconsistent expectations.

Most organizations have invested in leadership development. New managers attend a foundational program, directors learn a different model, and executives encounter still another set of competencies. Over time, capable people accumulate a large vocabulary for leadership without gaining a single shared standard for what successful leadership should look like.

The cost appears in ordinary decisions. A hiring panel may hold several definitions of leadership potential. A performance review may depend on the framework a particular leader happens to prefer. A succession discussion may label someone “high potential” without specifying which observable behaviors are already strong and which must scale before the next assignment.

This is not simply a training problem. It is a consistency problem. When the language changes across levels, leaders spend energy translating among models rather than building mastery. Employees can experience very different standards depending on which leader or function they happen to work for.

“A common language does not reduce judgment. It gives judgment a **clearer and more observable standard.”**

The LeaderCode is designed to create that standard without forcing identical leadership styles. It provides stable expectations, expressed through observable behavior, and a way to scale those expectations according to the work a leader performs.

ASK YOURSELF

- 1 *Could a first-line manager and a senior executive in your organization describe successful leadership in the same language? If the vocabulary changes with every program or level, the organization is asking leaders to navigate a system it has never fully defined.*

What makes The LeaderCode different

Most models name a competency. The LeaderCode clarifies what people should experience.

Traditional competency models often identify qualities such as communication, influence, collaboration, or strategic thinking. Those qualities matter, but broad labels leave significant room for interpretation. When an assessment asks whether someone “communicates effectively,” one rater may think about clarity, another about confidence, and another about responsiveness or style.

The same leader can therefore receive very different ratings even when the underlying behavior has not changed. The issue is not necessarily rater disagreement; it is that the standard was never defined precisely enough for the level at which the leader is operating.

The LeaderCode begins with the observable standard. It asks what successful leadership should look like when someone is Leading Individuals, Leading Leaders, or Leading the Enterprise. Communication remains important across all three levels, but its scope, complexity, and consequences are not the same.

“One code does not mean one-size-fits-all. It means shared language with expectations that scale.”

This distinction makes leadership easier to observe, discuss, assess, and develop. A leader’s opportunity no longer has to be described vaguely as a need to “be more strategic” or “communicate better.” It can be connected to a specific behavior and to the scale at which that behavior must now be demonstrated.

ASK YOURSELF

- 1 *When two people evaluate the same leader differently, can they point to a shared set of observable expectations, or are they each applying a personal definition of effective leadership?*

Three connected parts

A Foundation, Six Leadership Behaviors of Success, and a Ladder.

The LeaderCode is built from three connected parts. They are not separate programs or competing models. Each answers a different question and contributes a necessary dimension to the complete framework.

THE SYSTEM

01 The Leadership Foundation

WHAT MUST I BRING TO LEADERSHIP?

Knowing Your Role, Leading Yourself, and Working With Others establish the credibility, trust, and relationships through which leadership becomes possible.

02 The Six Leadership Behaviors of Success

WHAT SHOULD PEOPLE EXPERIENCE?

Purpose, Direction, Capability, Accountability, Engagement, and Results make the work of leading others observable.

03 The Leadership Ladder

AT WHAT LEVEL OF RESPONSIBILITY?

Leading Individuals, Leading Leaders, and Leading the Enterprise describe how the application expands as influence and consequence grow.

What supports leadership.

How leadership is demonstrated.

How its application changes as responsibility grows.

Together, the three parts turn leadership from an abstract ideal into a practical grid. A leader can locate the work, examine which patterns are strong or inconsistent, and focus development on the behaviors that will create the greatest value.

THREE QUESTIONS

What am I bringing to leadership? Which behaviors are people experiencing from me? Am I demonstrating those behaviors at the level my role requires?

01 The Leadership Foundation

The ground every leader continues to stand on.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Before leaders can guide other people effectively, they must understand what they own, manage themselves with discipline and self-awareness, and build productive relationships with the people around them. These expectations matter before someone receives a leadership title and remain essential after responsibility expands. If a person cannot do this before they lead, they absolutely will not be able to achieve these expectations when they lead.

WHAT THE FOUNDATION ASKS OF A LEADER

- 01 **Know Your Role** — credibility begins with understanding the outcomes you own, maintaining the expertise the work requires, exercising sound judgment, and recognizing how your contribution connects to the business.
- 02 **Lead Yourself** — trust grows from self-awareness, character, discipline, resilience, learning, and the ability to manage your reactions when pressure rises and other people are watching closely.
- 03 **Work With Others** — leadership becomes real through communication, emotional intelligence, collaboration, influence, and the ability to build trust and alignment within a team and across an organization.

The Foundation is not the first rung of the Leadership Ladder. It is the base beneath every rung. A person may begin developing these practices before entering formal management, but no leader graduates from them. As scope grows, the application becomes more complex: role clarity expands into governance and stewardship, self-leadership becomes more visible, and relationships must connect work across a larger system.

“Responsibility may expand, but credibility, self-leadership, and the ability to work productively with others *never* become optional.”

02 The LeaderCode™: The Six Leadership Behaviors of Success™

Six questions every employee and team needs leadership to address.

	BEHAVIOR	THE QUESTION IT ANSWERS
01	Purpose	Why does this work matter?
02	Direction	What should we focus on?
03	Capability	Do we have what it takes to succeed?
04	Accountability	Are we following through?
05	Engagement	Are people committed?
06	Results	Are we delivering what matters?

The order provides a useful way to remember the complete Code, but it is not a rigid sequence or checklist. Different situations require attention to different behaviors. Strong leaders learn to recognize what the moment requires while continuing to reinforce the system as a whole.

PAIRINGS MATTER

Purpose without Direction

May inspire without focusing effort.

Direction without Capability

Can create plans a team cannot carry out.

Accountability without Engagement

May produce compliance without commitment.

Results at the cost of the rest

Results achieved while weakening the other behaviors may be difficult to sustain.

“The behaviors are interdependent. The leadership task is to strengthen the pattern that the work requires now **without neglecting the whole.”**

03 The three-level Leadership Ladder

Choose the level based on the work, not the title.

The Leadership Ladder explains how the Foundation and six behaviors scale across three levels of formal, sustained responsibility. The levels are cumulative: moving upward adds responsibility but does not release leaders from the expectations below them.

- 01 **Leading Individuals** — the leader carries continuing responsibility for individual contributors and creates results through a team. The work includes assigning priorities, coaching, feedback, performance, development, and the conditions that allow people to succeed.
- 02 **Leading Leaders** — the leader develops people who lead others and connects work across teams, departments, regions, business units, or disciplines. The responsibility is not merely to produce several strong teams, but to align and integrate the system.
- 03 **Leading the Enterprise** — the leader shares responsibility for the health of the whole organization. The work includes strategy, investment, resources, culture, long-term capability, and decisions whose consequences extend beyond one function or geography.

Titles are not dependable indicators. A vice president in one organization may still be Leading Individuals, while an owner of a smaller business may be Leading the Enterprise. Reporting to the CEO does not automatically determine the level; the deciding factor is the scope of the work and responsibility for organizational outcomes.

IMPORTANT BOUNDARY

People can lead projects or influence others without formal authority, and those experiences are valuable preparation. The Ladder itself is calibrated to formal, sustained responsibility so that assessment and development can match the work leaders are expected to perform.

“As responsibility grows, leaders create less value through what they personally do and more through the conditions, leaders, and systems they enable.”

WHERE THE LEADER CREATES VALUE

LEADING INDIVIDUALS

Results are created through a team — priorities, coaching, feedback, performance, development, and the conditions that allow people to succeed.

LEADING LEADERS

Results are created through other leaders — developing them and aligning and integrating work across teams, departments, regions, business units, or disciplines.

LEADING THE ENTERPRISE

Results are created through the organization — strategy, investment, resources, culture, long-term capability, and decisions that extend beyond one function or geography.



One code, scaled expectations

Read across a row to see how the same element expands with responsibility.

ELEMENT	LEADING INDIVIDUALS	LEADING LEADERS	LEADING THE ENTERPRISE
Foundation	Know the role, lead yourself, and build productive direct relationships.	Clarify leadership roles, model self-leadership, and connect work across groups.	Establish role clarity, trust, governance, and enterprise stewardship.
Purpose	Connect individual and team work to customer and business impact.	Align leaders and teams around a shared contribution.	Define and protect purpose through strategy, culture, and investment.
Direction	Translate priorities into clear expectations and decisions.	Align multiple teams, priorities, handoffs, and decision rights.	Set strategy, make trade-offs, allocate resources, and establish focus.
Capability	Build skill, confidence, judgment, and ownership in the team.	Strengthen leadership quality, bench depth, expertise, and capacity.	Build organizational capability through talent, systems, and workforce choices.
Accountability	Create clear commitments, feedback, ownership, and follow-through.	Reinforce consistent standards through leaders and across teams.	Create governance and executive accountability that apply across the enterprise.
Engagement	Build trust, voice, recognition, connection, and growth.	Strengthen the leadership environment and commitment across groups.	Shape conditions, culture, and trust across the organization.
Results	Deliver sustainable outcomes through a team.	Integrate work and deliver through leaders and systems.	Steward enterprise performance and long-term organizational health.

This grid is a concise orientation, not a replacement for the full behavioral descriptions in the book. Its purpose is to make the scaling logic visible at a glance.

The Foundation and behaviors remain recognizable. Their **scope, complexity, time horizon, and consequences** expand.

Human leadership remains essential

Technology changes how work is performed; it does not remove the need for people to experience leadership.

Does any of this survive what is coming? We know that artificial intelligence can automate tasks, analyze information, identify patterns, draft content, and accelerate decisions. Those capabilities will continue to change roles, workflows, spans of responsibility, and the mechanics of management. They may also give leaders better information and more time to focus on the work that requires judgment and human connection.

None of that eliminates the questions people bring to work. Employees still need to understand why their contribution matters, what should receive attention, whether they have the knowledge and support to succeed, how commitments will be handled, whether their perspective matters, and what outcomes the organization is trying to create.

Technology can support those responsibilities, but leaders remain accountable for the choices and conditions through which people experience them. A tool can surface data, suggest options, or help translate a message. It cannot assume ownership for a difficult decision, establish trust through consistent conduct, or carry the organizational consequences of a trade-off.

“Technology may change the mechanics of work. The need for Purpose, Direction, Capability, Accountability, Engagement, and Results *remains*.”

The leadership advantage will therefore come not from resisting technology, but from using it thoughtfully while strengthening the human behaviors that allow people and organizations to adapt. The LeaderCode offers a stable language for that work even as the surrounding tools and structures continue to change.

A PRACTICAL QUESTION

- 1 *Where can technology improve speed, analysis, or access to information — and where must a leader still create meaning, exercise judgment, build trust, or accept accountability for the outcome?*

From a framework to an organizational capability

A shared language becomes valuable when it changes the decisions and routines that shape leadership.

A leadership framework should do more than provide language for a workshop. It becomes an operating model when the same expectations inform how an organization selects leaders, establishes success profiles, onboards people into new responsibilities, coaches performance, plans succession, recognizes growth, and measures leadership effectiveness.

TalentWise connects that work through three capabilities. Insight creates visibility into leadership, culture, and talent. Development translates insight into focused practice. Advisory helps leaders apply the Code to real business challenges and decisions. Each capability can stand alone, but the shared language allows them to reinforce one another.

INSIGHT	DEVELOPMENT	ADVISORY
See clearly.	Build capability.	Execute with confidence.
Use level-aligned self-assessment, 360 feedback, observation, business evidence, and another perspective where appropriate to identify consistent and inconsistent patterns.	Select one or two meaningful priorities, define observable actions, practice in real work, and review evidence over time.	Apply the shared language in coaching, team decisions, organizational design, succession, change, and other moments that shape performance.

“The goal is not another leadership initiative. It is a shared standard that becomes visible in **how the organization operates.”**

Organizations should begin at a scale they can sustain. An owner and a small management team may use the book’s assessments and regular development conversations. A larger enterprise may require validated assessments, success profiles, interview guides, onboarding standards, succession integration, governance, and leadership metrics. The scale changes; the underlying logic does not.

Assess the level, then focus the work

Useful assessment produces a development decision, not merely a score.

The first assessment decision is to identify the Leadership Ladder level that most closely reflects the work the leader performs, or the level against which the leader wants to be evaluated and developed. Titles are not the deciding factor. The assessment should be calibrated to the work and should examine observable behavior rather than effort, intention, or personality.

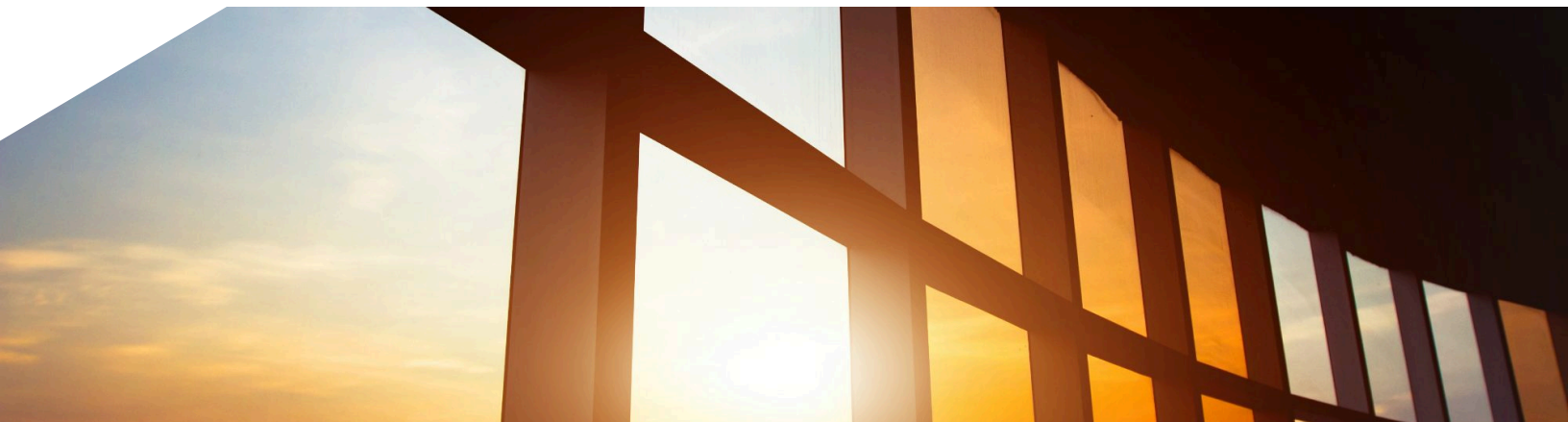
A self-assessment can create an economical starting point. Another perspective — from a leader, employee, peer, owner, coach, or formal 360 process — can reveal gaps between intent and experience. The purpose is not to produce a perfect score. It is to recognize what is working, identify where greater consistency would create value, and select a focused priority.

DEVELOPMENT FOR TODAY AND READINESS FOR WHAT COMES NEXT

The three-level Ladder also improves readiness conversations. A leader can be effective at the current level while still needing to stop previous work, start new responsibilities, and scale existing strengths before moving higher. The next-level expectations can guide development without turning every assessment into an automatic promotion recommendation.

This distinction matters in succession planning. Labels such as “high potential” are less useful than a clear view of the behaviors already demonstrated, the level at which they are demonstrated, and the experiences or support required before the leader is ready for broader responsibility.

Assessment should improve the probability of a better leadership decision. It cannot guarantee an outcome or replace judgment.



Turn insight into visible behavior

Leadership improves through application, reflection, and reinforcement.

An assessment shows where attention may be useful; it does not complete the development. Growth occurs when a leader translates a priority into observable actions and practices those actions in real meetings, decisions, conversations, and trade-offs. The work itself becomes the development environment.

The practice cycle remains stable across the Ladder: locate the work, examine the current pattern, choose a focus, define actions, practice, review evidence, and repeat. What changes is the context.

LEADING INDIVIDUALS

May require clearer coaching or more consistent follow-through.

LEADING LEADERS

May require asking more questions, returning ownership, and integrating work across groups.

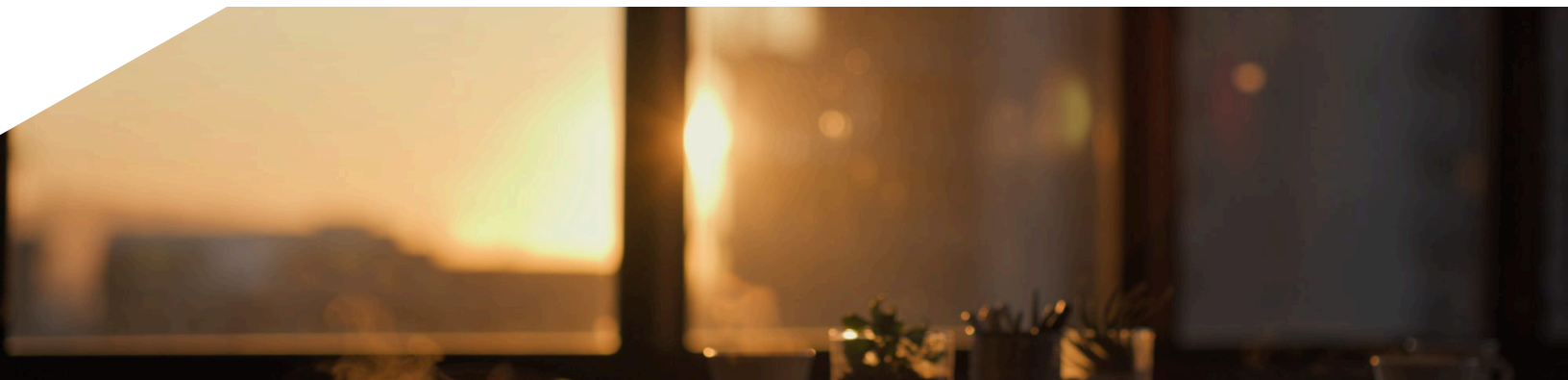
LEADING THE ENTERPRISE

May require difficult trade-offs, stronger executive accountability, or clearer signals through strategy, culture, and resource allocation.

Learn. Apply. Reflect. **Adjust. Repeat.**

REINFORCEMENT TURNS DEVELOPMENT INTO AN OPERATING RHYTHM

Organizations reinforce the Code when leaders use the language in ordinary work. When someone provides excellent Direction during a change, name it. When a manager delivers Results while weakening Engagement, discuss both. When a leader builds Capability by preparing someone for a larger role, recognize the contribution. When an executive avoids Accountability, do not allow title or performance to exempt the person from the standard.



Measure application, not attendance

What counts as evidence that leadership is changing.

Measurement should also extend beyond participation. Attendance and completed assessments show that leaders entered the process. Application requires evidence that conversations and behaviors are changing. Impact appears when improved leadership contributes to stronger employee experience, retention of the right people, and business outcomes relevant to the work.

01 Participation — attendance and completed assessments show that leaders entered the process.

02 Application — evidence that conversations and behaviors are changing.

03 Impact — stronger employee experience, retention of the right people, and business outcomes relevant to the work.

START FOCUSED

Choose the group and one or two behaviors where greater consistency could create meaningful value. Build the first application, establish a check-in rhythm, learn from the evidence, and expand only when the organization can reinforce what it begins.

KEEPING THE STANDARD HONEST

Coaching is often the right support at this point. Once a leader has chosen a priority and named the actions that would make it visible, progress usually depends on having someone who holds the standard, asks the harder question, and notices what is difficult to see from inside the work.

Beyond that, the standard only holds when it is applied to real business challenges — the decisions, trade-offs, and moments of pressure where leadership is actually tested. That is the point at which a shared language stops being a document and becomes what a team is held to.

One leader can change a team. A shared system can change an organization

Leadership is not short on ideas. It is short on a shared definition that leaders can use consistently. Most organizations have invested in leadership development, and capable people accumulate a large vocabulary for leadership without gaining a single shared standard for what successful leadership should look like. The cost is not paid in the workshop. It is paid in ordinary decisions — hiring panels, performance reviews, succession discussions — where several definitions of leadership are quietly in play at once.

The LeaderCode is designed to create a standard without forcing identical leadership styles. A Leadership Foundation for what a leader must bring. Six Leadership Behaviors of Success for what people should consistently experience. A three-level Ladder for how those expectations scale with responsibility. Together they turn leadership from an abstract ideal into a practical grid a leader can locate their own work inside.

“One common code should not make every leader look the same. It should make successful leadership **easier to recognize while allowing the application to adapt.”**

A common language does not reduce judgment. It gives judgment a clearer and more observable standard — and that standard becomes valuable only when it changes the decisions and routines that shape leadership. The behavior remains recognizable. The standard rises with the responsibility.

Read, assess, or start a conversation

The framework becomes useful when it changes how leadership is understood and practiced.

READ

Explore *The LeaderCode: The Six Leadership Behaviors of Success™* for the full treatment of the Leadership Foundation, the six behaviors, the three-level Ladder, leadership transitions, assessment, development, and organizational application.

APPLY

Use the shared language in a real decision: a development conversation, a leadership-team discussion, a promotion or succession review, an onboarding plan, or a moment when greater consistency would improve the work.

ASSESS

Use the level-aligned self-assessment in the book or a TalentWise assessment such as the LeaderLens 360™ to examine how leadership is experienced, recognize strengths, and choose a focused development priority.

TALK

Explore how The LeaderCode could support leadership insight, development, and advisory work in your organization.

One leader can change a team. A shared leadership system can change an organization.



Start the conversation

A shared standard is easier to build with someone who has built one before.

If this guide sharpened a question about how leadership is defined, developed, or held to a standard in your organization, that is the signal worth following.

READY TO TALK

Book a thirty-minute conversation. We will listen more than we talk, and we will be honest about what the answers are telling you.

Email email@talentwisepartners.com · Call or text **214-462-7784**

Or book directly at talentwisepartners.com/contact

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