

# LEADERSHIP Excellence

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## Schedule the Big Rocks

As leaders survey the landscape from the high and sacred place of petroglyphs, they give thanks for their blessings and pray for success.



<p><b>JOY STROUD RUHMANN</b>  <i>Strategy Execution</i>                  Start making this your core competency. . . . . 3</p> <p><b>ANDREW BLUM</b>  <i>Breakthrough Strategy</i>                  Recognize how emotions influence decisions. . . . . 4</p> <p><b>JANE JORDAN-MEIER</b>  <i>Crisis Management</i>                  Become highly effective in the four stages. . . . . 4</p> <p><b>ISAAC GETZ</b>  <i>Leader of the Free Culture</i>                  You can make the ideal your cultural reality. . . . . 5</p> <p><b>JEAN KELLEY</b>  <i>Are You Leader Material?</i>                  Start playing the game. . . . 6</p>	<p><b>JOHN ANDERSON AND MARC MICHAELSON</b>  <i>Smart Skills</i>                  With these, you can lead without a title. . . . . 7</p> <p><b>MARSHALL GOLDSMITH</b>  <i>Leadership Identity</i>                  Four sources combine to influence your mojo. . . . . 8</p> <p><b>HARLAN STEINBAUM</b>  <i>7 Universal Principles</i>                  Use these to make tough leadership calls. . . . 9</p> <p><b>WENDY AXELROD AND JEANNIE COYLE</b>  <i>Grow Your Talent</i>                  Develop people via work. .10</p> <p><b>DAVID ROCK</b>  <i>NeuroLeadership</i>                  Apply social qualities. . . .11</p>	<p><b>BARACK OBAMA</b>  <i>Power of Principles</i>                  Unity builds strength. . . .12</p> <p><b>SUE TODD</b>  <i>Get Leaders Teaching</i>                  Enjoy the benefits. . . . . 13</p> <p><b>CHRISTINA BALDWIN AND ANN LINNEA</b>  <i>The Circle Way</i>                  Put leaders in all chairs. .14</p> <p><b>STEPHEN R. COVEY</b>  <i>Five Choices</i>                  These empower you. . . .14</p> <p><b>OWEN SULLIVAN</b>  <i>Global Leaders</i>                  Why they win or fail. . . .15</p> <p><b>BILL BAKER</b>  <i>Storyteller-in-Chief</i>. . .15</p>	<p><b>MARC BLUMENTHAL</b>  <i>Reinvent Succession</i>                  Leverage technology. . . .16</p> <p><b>JEFFREY COHN AND JAY MORAN</b>  <i>Choosing Leaders</i>                  Know what to look for. . .17</p> <p><b>DAVID DEFILIPPO AND STEVE ARNESON</b>  <i>Building LD Programs</i>                  Pay attention to detail. . .18</p> <p><b>RANDY GORUK</b>  <i>Gain a Leader's Edge</i>                  Develop competencies. . .18</p> <p><b>JENNIFER PROSEK</b>  <i>Jumpstart Growth</i> . . . .19</p> <p><b>TONY SCHWARTZ</b>  <i>Energy Engagement</i>                  Create innovative culture. .20</p>
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# Grow Your Talent

*Make daily work developmental.*



by Wendy Axelrod and Jeannie Coyle

LAST YEAR WE WORKED WITH A LEADER at a large company. Anguishing over the failing results of a key director, he described her as *stretched beyond capacity*, overwhelmed by putting out fires, and doing a poor job of developing her direct reports. After we suggested ways he could help her develop others, he told us “Sounds great, but, I don’t want to *mess in her business*. Besides, I lack the time to work on *her staff issues*.” Taken aback, we speculated that her approach to developing people was most probably mimicking his!

*Too many executives are hands-off when it comes to development.* While most leaders know that they should be helping people learn from experience, *only 12 percent do it*. In fact, most still turn to the TM department or send people to training. These programs—along with *performance management* and *managerial coaching*—only get people to do their jobs more efficiently without expanding their capabilities.

So, are these executives doomed to *living with underdeveloped talent* or *hiring fully developed talent*? Not according to the *exceptional managers* who develop their people *daily* while they get results.

## A New Standard

Exceptional Development Managers (EDMs) use five people development practices:

**1. Make every day a development day.** EDMs drive growth by using the work itself to develop people. They carve out *targeted developmental work assignments*. They add to and reshape work, purposely stretching the space for people to grow skills while they achieve business results. EDMs stay ever-present as *active participants* to support employees’ *development on the job*. That also enables them to seize developmental moments. As one EDM said, “When I see something—good, bad or ugly—I speak with the employee about it and don’t wait for a meeting.”

**2. Tap the psychological side of**

**development.** To help employees’ master new, complex skills, the development process must also be *psychological*. For example, someone who likes solo problem solving will hardly become good at collaborative group decision making by reading about it. He would benefit from his manager’s counsel to gain self-insight about his current preferences and to explore obstacles to operating more collaboratively. Tapping into *the psychological side of development* involves building a trusting relationship, making it secure for employees to open up to managers, and hear and act on their feedback. Getting to know employees on a deeper level also helps managers identify just how far they can stretch each employee.

EDMs encourage employees to step out of their comfort zone, take risks, and become aware of their internal drivers by providing a safety net. As one employee expressed, “My greatest development came when my manager really pushed me out on the ledge, but quietly had my back the whole time.”

**3. Connect people with development partners.** Many leaders value the idea of having others help to develop their people. *Leaders can open the door to expertise that goes beyond their own* while increasing their staff’s ability to find and work with learning resources. EDMs help employees reach out to others. Next, they identify the right experts, based on the targeted skills that their employees need to learn. For example, they might help one employee reverse a souring key account by having him understudy a *legend* at turning unhappy customers into content ones.

EDMs guide employees to both make the most of the new relationship, and be efficient with the *volunteer development partner*. EDMs leverage lessons learned, look for gaps, and hone how people apply newly learned skills.

**4. Teach skills to navigate organization politics.** EDMs tout the importance of helping their employees understand organization politics. Functional and technical skills can get their people just so far. To succeed, employees also need to know how to navigate the politics and appropriately influence others.

This isn’t about *manipulating the system*. It is about people *being realistic and strategic* regarding how decisions are made and ensuring their ideas get heard. It is also about being sensitive to the needs of the organization, providing results that will resonate well with all stakeholders. Landscapes are littered with fallen solutions, and sometimes, fallen bodies of product champions who never learned to “socialize” their solution and shape it properly. EDMs work with people to map the political terrain, plan an approach, and practice the skills to thrive in the terrain.

**5. Shape your environment to drive development.** Remember the last time you experienced a culture that teemed with positive employee energy—people working hard, in constant learning mode and enjoying it? EDMs weave development into the texture of their culture, making it abundant to all.



*They develop talent not just among a few high potentials, but across the board, circulating work challenges among team members, keeping everyone on the learning edge, and making learning a requirement, not an option.*

EDMs manage the interface between the employee’s world and the organization. They divert distractions from day-to-day development and ingeniously adapt the organization’s talent development tools to their department’s needs. Creating a buffer between their team’s culture and the demands of the organization, *they satisfy both while maximizing team learning*. The result is *an oasis of daily development that is a magnet for talent and a prototype for the organization*.

**Like the EDMs, you can reap huge benefits in the growth of your people.** Learn from their *Five Practices to grow talent while you grow results*. **These five practices make managers a powerful force for development.** The time and effort you take to drive development is offset by employees’ increased ability to carry a larger load, and reduction in rework. Benefits abound. Employees get a *palpable investment* in their future; the company gets stronger talent. Yet, EDMs feel they get the greatest reward—*higher job satisfaction*—because they are not only achieving results, but developing people as they create their legacy. LE

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**ACTION: Make everyday work developmental.**