

UNWRITTEN The Rules of Leadership

What they
never told you
about
building a
high-
performance
organization



Darrin L. Harris

Nonprofit Strategist and Mental Health Expert

UNWRITTEN
The ^Rules of
Leadership

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INTRO

Shhh, don't tell anybody, but I am about to let you in on the big secrets of running a non-profit business. In fact, I am going to reveal the essential building blocks success, no matter what work you do. This book is made up of rules that people usually don't have the courage to tell you. These are organizational philosophies that your closest contemporaries won't impart for fear that you might get so successful, you'll knock them off their perch.

Personally, I feel there's lots of room on that perch. I like surrounding myself with knowledgeable, passionate men and women—whether in my congregation, office or personal life—to share our personal stories for mutual betterment. Mine is a “more-the-merrier” philosophy born from the fact that I have a faith-based love for my fellow man (and woman). I have been bolstered by the friendship and love I have been shown, particularly during some of

the lowest times in my life. In many instances that genuine caring has come from those who haven't even known me all that long.

Currently, I lead one of the largest nonprofits in America, which provides mental health peer support services. In addition, I provide business consulting and motivational speaking services. I am writing this ebook to speak to leaders of any organization who wish to take an unconventional approach to success by thinking outside of the box.

Like you, I have suffered through personal tragedies and have gained strength from what I have learned about myself from these life challenges. Good counseling from quite a few institutions got me through substance addictions and mental health challenges. I found God at an early age and started preaching to a thousand-strong congregation (Greater St. Stephen Full Gospel Baptist Church in New Orleans, LA) in my teens. At the age of 18, after the untimely death of my younger brother (the horrific defining moment of my life), I finished high school and raced to enlist in the Marines. I made it through their rigorous training. This many years later, I apply so much of what I learned. It never occurred to me that one day I would use these same skills to collaborate with this country's best ministries to rebuild the infrastructure of my hometown of New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

I traveled to Zimbabwe with some of those ministries and returned stateside to build a dream into the reality of the multi-million dollar nonprofit Ekhaya Youth Project. I work now as its CEO. I also am a sought-after lecturer, which allows me to speak to and mentor hundreds of men and women. This summer I will add "author" to my list of accomplishments, when my biography, *Living Life, Leaving Legacy*, is published.

While climbing up my often rickety ladder of success I developed some rules to live and work by. These are not just some cliché sayings I have on plaques on my office wall or memes you'd find

on my Facebook page. These are the unwritten rules of leadership as I have come to know and use them. They are actual working kernels of how to build a high-performing organization.

I really believe that everyone has something to contribute. We can all help our fellow men and women, regardless of our age, social status or skin color. In this ebook, I give you a glimpse into my life story, *Living Life, Leaving Legacy*. My story is one of working hard every day, of finding successes not just in profit, but in the *profitability* of doing good work and most importantly, in letting the people I work with know they are valued. I hope you come away from these 3000 words being able to look at the work you do in a clearer light.

I want to hear from you. What are your biggest challenges in leadership? What obstacles hold you back? What are your secrets to successful leadership? I respond to everyone who writes to me. Email me at Darrin@darrinharris.com. If you like what you read here, I invite you to sign up to be notified when *Living Life, Leaving Legacy* is released in late summer 2016. Sign up at darrinharris.com.

May the greatest happiness and peace find you and your loved ones.

Darrin L. Harris

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EKHAYA

Ekhaya” is a Zulu word, meaning “home.” The Ekhaya Youth Project I lead today is America’s largest and Louisiana’s first statewide family support organization. We are certainly “home” for thousands of youth and adults who have suffered through the mental and behavioral health system in a multitude of ways. At Ekhaya, we work hard to:

- Place people into permanent and safe housing.
- Counsel men and women of all ages with drug or mental health issues.
- Help to get adequate medical care for AIDS patients.
- Find people jobs.
- Build better communal outreach possibilities.
- Work with all minorities, from people of various ethnicities

and religions to the LGBTQ community on building from their budding social status.

- Find for new ways to be proactive in the community we serve and for the people we come to care for.

The Ekhaya Youth Project was born from a dream I first had when visiting South Africa in 2007. There I visited the Ekhaya Multi-Cultural Arts Center, a facility run completely by the youth and young adults.

I came back to the U.S. emboldened by the spirit of those young people working to bring love and life into their impoverished situation. I thought about all the ministry work I did before going on my trip, my love for Louisiana and New Orleans in particular, and my nearly life-long preaching for countless congregations. I thought about my Marine training and even the tragedy of my young brother's death when we were both teens and it was clear that all of my experiences were coalescing into a clear destiny I had to follow. For 8 months I worked at nothing else but building, researching and learning about how to present my case to the state of Louisiana and get funding for Ekhaya. Today Ekhaya boasts a multi-million dollar annual operating budget and I am its CEO.

For a multitude of reasons, none being my income, I feel very much like a success. I have the love and respect of family, friends and co-workers that I adore. My faith hasn't ever been stronger and God has seen me through some very dark days indeed. How did I get here? How do I stay on top of my game?

I credit the following unwritten rules for my rise to success and my ability to continue to bring my A-game.

THE UWRITTEN RULES

The tips I'm about to share may seem obvious at first, but many leaders miss golden opportunities because they fail to recognize these core truths. In fact, these are ideas well known in everyday business life. You probably apply a few of these without even realizing it. The trick is that it can be hard to consistently put rules into practice if we do not identify and articulate them. In some cases, I've found people trying very hard to hoard these concepts by stating things like: "I have scraped and worked hard to get here. You must do the same. I'm not giving you any insights."

I'm not a hoarder.

As you will come to find if you read my upcoming book *Living Life, Leaving Legacy*, there are lots of sayings, pearls-of-wisdom, and lessons learned that I pick up all the time. I feel though that the rules below are the 'cream of the crop' of what's best to know about business and running an organization, no matter the size. I invite you to sift through these pages and see what truths apply to you and your leadership challenges.

IF THE BENEFITS OUTWEIGH THE RISKS, THEN THERE ARE NO RISKS.

Whether it's embarking on a romantic relationship, buying a new car, or running your business, there will always be risk. It's unavoidable. I'll let you in on another little secret: You're not perfect, and whatever it is you are going to do, or whomever you might do it with, won't be perfect either. There are going to be hurdles to jump, and oftentimes mountains to move. In the end, though, if it is worth moving that proverbial mountain to reach your goals, then there really are no risks. There are just challenges to circumnavigate.

**YOU CAN'T MANAGE
WHAT YOU DO NOT
MEASURE.
IF YOU'RE NOT
MEASURING IT, YOU'RE
NOT MANAGING IT.**
—Peter Drucker

This is not as esoteric as it sounds. Simply put, there should be some way for you to measure the work you do. In order to recognize forward momentum or back sliding, both personally and organizationally, you must find some criteria to track. This is key to effective management.

TRADE-OFFS CREATE PAYOFFS.

—John Maxwell

Be humble enough to recognize that in certain instances where you might be giving away something in the now, you might gain from this sacrifice later. If you are presently working at a cut rate with a client, then weigh the fact that you might be building a long-term relationship with this client that will yield greater rewards. None of us has a crystal ball. In business as in life we often take some hard hits that never see a clear return. But that old axiom about never burning a bridge has come back to serve me time and again. I have seen plenty of trade-offs come back tenfold as payoffs I could have never imagined.

THE MEMBERS OF YOUR STAFF ARE TEAM MEMBERS, NOT EMPLOYEES.

This concept must be born out of humility—yours. It serves no one for you play boss just to lord a title or your social status over someone. If you are looking for dedicated employees who will respect you and the job, you must respect them. It behooves you to look at the people who work for you as part of your team, not your underlings or even employees (though they know they are). One of the more valuable lessons I learned in the Marines was that no man (or woman) works alone. We are all only as strong as our weakest link. If everyone helps out, the work gets done that much better and that much faster. as much as you need time to develop and work your business.

IF YOU FOCUS ON THE PROBLEM, YOU'LL NEVER FIND THE SOLUTION.

Leading an organization can sometimes feel like a never-ending obstacle course. In just trying to make a buck, soliciting clients and trying to find a way to be better than the competition, problems seem to consistently rise up on our road to success. If we focus on just the speed bumps, we will miss the road paved with solutions. Guaranteed, the solutions are out there.

WE DON'T HAVE PROBLEMS; WE ONLY EXPERIENCE CHALLENGES.

When problems arise, and they will, we need to look at them as challenges. This might seem like a simple matter of semantics. It's bigger than that. The minute you change your focus and reframe what you are experiencing, by simply changing the words you use, you'll come to see a road paved with solutions.

A **challenge** is something you can battle over and find an answer to. Conversely, a **problem** weighs us down, seems to stick to us, barnacle-like.

DON'T ALLOW THE MOMENT TO DEFINE YOU. DEFINE THE MOMENT.

Putting this into practice will require a change of focus, a shift of where you allow your attention to land. By taking charge (and you will note that the one overarching theme of these rules is grabbing the bull by the horns and taking charge) you dictate the how, when, why and where of whatever comes to you and your team. Very often what seem to be big upheavals in our lives and businesses come to grab us hard for a good long shake. But in the end these difficult moments pass. Problems lose their power over time. If we define the moment, if we dictate terms, we can increase or decrease the impact of the circumstance as we see fit.

LEARNING TO SAY “YES” TO YOURSELF WILL SOMETIMES REQUIRE YOU TO SAY “NO” TO OTHERS.

This is a hard one to swallow in business and in our personal lives. A ‘yes’ to one request, very often will mean “no” to another. You really can’t be all things to all people, and there will come times when you need to choose only one place or person to give your time and attention to. Prioritizing often brings fallout, but it is a skill that must be learned in order for us to be successful and continue forward momentum.

DO IT RIGHT THE FIRST TIME.

I had a commanding officer in the Marines who barked this rule at us all the time. Actually, when he said it, it was an order. But it makes sense. In all that you do, do 'it' right the first time. Forget shortcuts or the easy way out. Don't take the cheaper option (you will indeed get what you pay for). Don't waste time or resources when in the end you are most likely going to return to the right way of doing the thing anyway. Plan well. Harness your resources. Do your research and gather all you need. Set out to do what you need to do, from the trivial to the important, the right way, right out of the gate.

BALANCE BEFORE BURN OUT.

I've definitely experienced burnout. After giving the presentation to the state of Louisiana that won us the Ekhaya contract, I literally collapsed in the back of my parent's car on the way home and slept for days.

I burned myself out from all the work leading up to that point. Unfortunately we don't always recognize the burn out. We don't many times see the stresses we are under. In many cases (and again I have been guilty of this as well) we might come to a wide variety of diversions to mask exhaustion so we can keep our engines running when we are on "E." We kid ourselves into believing we don't need to stop, take a rest, and recharge the batteries. I know it's hard for the workaholics and type-A leaders to acknowledge, but developing a work-play balance is crucial. Without the down times, you will be down and out after a time. You need time for rest and relaxation, as much as you need time to develop and work your business.

IN CLOSING

We often know instinctively what's right for us. We can sense what's happening around us (good or bad) and faith in our abilities and good common sense bring us right to where we want to be.

You measure success for yourself. It's not for me to tell you when you have reached your goals or even what your goals should be. In gleaning from the nuggets of wisdom I gained from rising up the ladder of my own success, I hope you realize that your dreams are within your grasp.

7 STRATEGIES FOR VISION SUCCESS

1. Get a Vision.

In order to be successful every leader must have a vision and lead with that vision. The vision must be Bold, Brilliant, Beneficial and BIG! Vision is the ship that gives leaders the ability to sail and navigate quickly to new frontiers. In fact, without a vision organizations perish.

2. Communicate the Vision .

The leader must have the ability to clearly communicate the organization's vision. To create the vision the leader must get it out of the brain and make it plain. The best methodology for communicating the vision is to establish a set of clear goals that are accompanied by detailed objectives. The goals are the ultimate outcomes while the objectives provide specific steps needed to achieve the goals. People are more likely to follow leaders who are vision-focused. Effective leaders must create the buy-in to get the all-in.

3. Entrust the Vision

One of the most challenging tasks for any leader is releasing, and entrusting, the vision to others. Because trust is something that is earned the leader must be intentional about identifying individuals who have integrity, ability, consistency and a commitment to the leader, vision and organization. A leader must develop trust and that will require time and relationship building.

4. Empower the Vision

When a leader empowers other individuals within an organization to implement the vision, there is a greater possibility for success. In fact, one of the most important responsibilities of a leader is to empower. When a leader is effective at empowering their team members their overall productivity will increase. On the other hand the leader must be open and aware, while providing space for failure and self-improvement. The leader should also remind team members that failure is not final.

5. Delegate the Vision.

The art of delegation is one of the most important and powerful tools that a leader can use to implement the organization's vision. Delegating tasks and responsibilities provides balance and prevents burnout. The larger the organization grows, the higher the leader's profile becomes. These increases demand a greater need to delegate and hold team members accountable for their performance. Due to the competing demands and heightened pressures of leadership, the ability to effectively delegate is crucial to a leader's success. When used properly delegation will free the leader to grow and expand the organization.

6. Evaluate the Vision.

Evaluate Everything. Monitor Everything. Measure Everything. Count the cost. When the leader evaluates the progress of the vision, important insights and knowledge are obtained. This type of evaluation provides the leader with the ability to adapt and overcome organizational challenges.

7. Improve the Vision

In order for the leader and the organization to remain competitive and relevant the leader must constantly seeks ways to improve service/product quality and customer satisfaction. Improving the vision also improves the value of the leader, service/product and organization. Improving the value of the vision requires the leader take risks and be innovative.



Darrin L. Harris

Chief Executive Officer of Ekhaya Youth Project, Inc.

Darrin L. Harris is a native of New Orleans, Louisiana. After a life-changing visit to Africa in 2007, Darrin L. Harris began Ekhaya Youth Project, Inc. --a nonprofit that serves and supports youth and their families. In 2014, Darrin L. Harris expanded the mental health component of the organization by providing clinical support services through the Ekhaya Fresh Start Behavioral Health Program.

Darrin L. Harris | Board Member

- Family Run Executive Directors and Leaders Association
- Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
- Unity of Greater New Orleans for Homeless



Ekhaya Youth Project, Inc. Achievements

Awarded Grants

In 2010, Ekhaya Youth Project, Inc. was awarded a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation and Peyton Manning's PeyBack Foundation to implement an anti-violence/mentoring initiative for at-risk youth in the Greater New Orleans community.

In 2011, Ekhaya Youth Project, Inc. was awarded a HUD grant from Unity of Greater New Orleans to implement a pilot program targeting unsheltered transition-aged homeless youth ages 18-24.

Louisiana Behavioral Health Partnership

In 2013, Ekhaya Youth Project became the country's first statewide family support organization through a partnership with the Louisiana Behavioral Health Partnership and Magellan Health Services in Louisiana.

Expansion

Darrin L. Harris has been able to expand the number of employees from: 1 in 2007 to over 600 in 2016 who service over 2000 youth and families with mental and behavioral health challenges in Louisiana.

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Former Marine and top business executive, Darrin L. Harris is the country's acknowledged leader in helping nonprofit and for-profit organizations grow their base. This invaluable ebook is a glimpse into his insights, tips and secrets.

Darrin's expertise spans the corporate world: fundraising, business infrastructure, human resources, management and leadership development, sales strategy, and branding.

In addition, Darrin has been on the front line of social reforms, getting aid to young people aged-out of foster care, helping those who live with debilitating illnesses, caring for the homeless, assisting the disenfranchised and marginalized in our society, and supporting youth beset with mental or behavioral challenges.

In *The (Unwritten) Rules of Leadership* Darrin combines time-proven strategies with an innovative framework that invites leaders to develop a unique organizational vision. Darrin's unwritten rules guides leaders around common leadership pitfalls and towards tangible success.

UNWRITTEN The Rules of Leadership

**For more information on speaking engagements
Darrin L. Harris visit www.darrinharris.com.**