Suggestions for Reading & Using Decoding the Workplace: 50 Keys to Understanding People in Organizations

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SUGGESTIONS FOR

READING & USING *DECODING THE WORKPLACE*

The Benefits

Decoding the Workplace should help you

- better understand the workplace

- better understand others

- better understand yourself

- form ideas to improve your effectiveness

- form ideas to improve your decision making

I cannot guarantee results but I can offer suggestions to increase the odds. I know the information in this book has helped me and thousands of others. The information is based on what researchers have learned about behavior in the workplace, why people do what they do and the various things that affect us in the workplace.

How much and in what ways this book helps you ultimately depends on you. Here I'll offer suggestions for reading and using *Decoding the Workplace*.

A Wide Focus

The famous NBA basketball coach Gregg Popovich stated that "John Ballard breaks down the workplace into its parts and then shows how the parts work." He nailed it. For example, if we think of the workplace

as a vast landscape with rivers, mountains, hills, valleys, forests, and such, I take each part and explain it and how it affects you and others in the workplace.

The Kirkus Review for *Decoding the Workplace* said that I cover "a lot of territory." That is true. Most career, leadership, self-improvement types of books usually focus on several key ideas. *Decoding the Workplace* covers everything from how we see the world and others see us, to our motivations, to how people use power, and so much more.

I have tried to cover the main concepts and ideas that can best help you understand what is happening around you. For example, I do not write about personality; I write about behaviors. It takes time to understand someone's personality, if you ever do, but you can observe their behaviors: how they act, what they say, what they do. To understand behavior in the workplace, both ours and others, we need to understand the various factors that affect behavior, the factors we can perceive. Some factors will be more important to you than other factors.

The Terms

You may notice the book uses terms for concepts and ideas that may sound scholarly. Don't be put off by any terms that you may perceive as sounding like academic jargon. The terms you read about (such as norms, roles, organizational socialization, etc.) are the terms used by people who study the workplace.

1. Using the terms, I can explain what the concept is about and add clarity. I can explain why it is important. For example organizational culture and organizational climate are different (see page 93). One is much easier to change than the other.

2. The terms give you the language to talk about workplace dynamics. For example, people in the workplace may talk about onboarding the new employee. That is only part of a larger concept, organizational socialization. The terms help develop a meaningful and mutually understood vocabulary.

3. Importantly if you find a concept you want to learn more about, you have the right term in order to research it.

The Stories

Throughout the book are over 100 stories. The stories illustrate the concept being discussed. Feedback to me is that the stories are very helpful.

Some of the stories are clearly identified. These are based on organizational experiences with names, companies, etc., changed. Some of the stories may sound familiar because you have seen, heard, or experienced something similar.

Other stories are from my life and embedded in the narrative. These likewise are intended to amplify and clarify concepts.

The Keys

I have identified 50 keys that I have found especially useful in decoding the workplace. The 50 keys are general guidelines. They hold true in most situations but not necessarily all. They are grounded in theory and research and have practical applications. Some will be new insights; others may be insights you intuitively understand but have implications you may not have considered.

In addition to the 50 keys, I expect you will find other "keys" that I have not highlighted but that are relevant to you.   .

How to Read

It's easy just to read a book and not really think about what you are reading. To get the most from *Decoding the Workplace*, I suggest you read slowly and systematically. In a separate guide I have suggested reading and thinking about a key or two each day for 50 days (5 days a week for 10 weeks). This should take about 5 – 10 minutes most days.

Think about what you are reading.
Does it make sense?
Can you think of examples from your workplace, your experiences?

Robert Morris and others have suggested reading this book with a highlighter or pen nearby. Highlight passages that make you think, that

give you a different perspective. Make notes if you wish. The more you think about what you read, the more you may benefit. Several readers have suggested returning to the book later and rereading your highlights.

Reflection

Decoding the Workplace is not preachy. I do not tell you do this or don't do that. Rather *Decoding the Workplace* helps you reflect on your own workplace experiences.

Reflecting on experience is one of the most powerful ways to learn as adults. When we reflect, we think about an experience and what happened. We think about what went right, what went wrong, we think about the behavior of others and our own behavior. What did I learn? What would I do differently? *Decoding the Workplace* gives you ideas and concepts by which to reflect and analyze your workplace experiences.

Results

As a result of thinking about a concept and reflecting on your experience, you may see things differently or get new ideas.

1. One possible outcome is reframing. You may have a different understanding of why someone did what they did or why things are the way they are. For example, why did people in the story on page 94 see the negotiators as wimps? They were perceived that way because

the physical environment in which they worked resulted in their becoming low-talkers and low-talking became their usual behavior. When the people for whom they worked understood this, they reframed how they viewed them – and got them into a better physical environment.

2. Another outcome is evaluating. You may see yourself or your boss or a co-worker in the story of Erica and Marcus on page 158. If you see yourself, you know how to change your behavior and improve your performance. If your boss does this, you now understand he or she may not understand the implications of what he or she is doing. Or consider the questions on page 112 about how well you know your boss. Your answers to those questions can tell you a lot – and suggest actions.

3. Another possibility is that you may try different behaviors. In the book I talk about "hypotheses," ideas we have about the way things work. It's likely there may be some idea where you will want to experiment with different ways of doing things. For example, the chapters on power contain various ideas to be develop influence. By trying different behaviors, attending to how people react, and making adjustments to your behavior, you should become more effective in the workplace.

Reframe, Evaluate, Experiment

I hope these suggestions have been helpful. I welcome your comments.