

Cracking the Corporate Code

Navigate the intangibles and excel

Each organisation has its own set of unwritten rules that guide the behaviour, action, and evaluation of everyone there. They are intangible, embedded in the culture, in the deeply felt system of shared values and assumptions that explains how members of the organisation think, feel and act. They are organic and dynamic, flexing and changing as people come and go and priorities change. Every successful leader understands these rules at some level and knows how to operate within them.

Yet, these rules and cultures were in the main created by and for White men! So to succeed as a Different Leader you must develop a personal strategy for understanding, managing and influencing these organisational cultures, for navigating your way through the intangibles and excelling – for cracking the corporate code!

TOP TIPS FOR CRACKING THE CORPORATE CODE¹

1. Progression – It's all about LEADERSHIP

- Your technical/functional skills are not enough. You need to be able to lead!
- Take an inventory of your skills – strengths and areas for improvement.
- Delivering adequate results is not enough - you must find ways to exceed and excel.

2. Organisational culture – Get the knowledge, wisdom and understanding of how your organisation really works

- Be acutely aware of the organisational climate in which you operate – it impacts on your ability to effectively execute your leadership – be flexible but remain focused on your goals.

3. Organisational 'politics' – Be Politically Savvy

- Who are your allies; what obligations and favours have been built up between you and other colleagues – keep track of them and collect on them in service of your goals – this an important rule of the corporate game.
- Study the politics of every situation. Be alert to who is affected by your leadership decisions. Be ahead of the game and try to anticipate their responses and reactions.
- Skilfully work to ensure your voice is heard; get your ideas on the agenda at key meetings.
- Keep your antennae tuned to power shifts and the effect they have on all people who have influence over you, your work assignments, your ability to carry out your tasks, and your performance appraisals. With every shift there is a need to establish or re-establish relationships with all relevant players.

4. Stakeholders – Develop and manage your key stakeholders

- Determine who knows you and develop relationships with the individuals that will champion you when you're not in the room.
- Identify and gain regular and frequent access to decision makers.

¹ The source for many of these tips is: Cracking the Corporate Code: The Revealing Success Stories of 32 African-American Executives, Price M Cobbs and Judith L Turner, (2003), AMACOM

- Never neglect your peers or the colleagues that report into you as a part of your support base.
- Constantly massage your relationships. If networks are not tended to, people will find new power sources.
- Give time and information to the people you value, so they know they are aligned with the right person.
- Remain acutely sensitive to the consequences of your decisions and actions. Be willing to be patient to make certain you keep the right people informed.

5. Leadership ibrand – Raise your profile

- Publicise in the most subtle yet skilful way, who you are and what you do.
- Strive for desirable assignments – for yourself and your staff – particularly those at or near the centre of organisational priorities.
- Participate on problem solving task forces and other high visibility activities.

6. Network – Overcome the isolation through networking with like-minded people and with other Different Leaders

- Ensure that you build a diverse a network.

7. Bias – Deal with and overcome stereotypes and bias. Manage your Micro-triggers and make others aware of theirs

8. Strategy – Design and implement a conscious, deliberate strategy to succeed

- Never be apologetic – you are entitled to have and use your personal power.
- Fight to win additional resources.
- Know when to withdraw or back down, in order to win out in the end.
- Be ever vigilant to the reality of changed circumstances – different alliances, new people, changing facts, data, and priorities – and be prepared to adjust your strategies accordingly.
- Don't squander your time, energy and power on needless fights. Set priorities so you can identify the issues and situations you must influence, and say no to issues that are unimportant to – or can divert you from – your goals.

9. Organisational priorities – Focus on the organisation's interests

- Always remember – don't flaunt your power and position, you will only make more enemies.
- Rescue a colleague or a project in trouble.
- Make certain everything you do is focused on benefiting the interests of the organisation. If others perceive you as only self-serving, the organisation will turn against you.

10. Communication – plug into the formal and informal information network

- Access to the organisation's communication network is always critical – information is power
- Position yourself to receive early information about decisions, policies and organisational shifts.