

CHRIS WIDENER

AUTHOR OF *The Angel Inside* AND *The Art of Influence*

LEADERSHIP RULES

A FABLE

How to Become the Leader You Want to Be

Praise for *Leadership Rules*

“Once again Chris Widener provides the reader a fascinating story. The reader will savor time-tested principles of leadership by example. This is a must-read in the arsenal of any aspiring leader!”

—**David Humphrey**, president, ILD Global

“I love books that have business stories with meaningful takeaways. They’re fun to read yet provide actions that help improve me and my business. Chris Widener’s *Leadership Rules* is a simple read with simple, practical rules that will help you become a better leader of people.”

—**Tony Alessandra**, author, *The NEW Art of Managing People* and *The Platinum Rule*

“Fundamental principles captured in a warm-hearted story line. Quickly digested. Harder to apply. Recommended for those who intend to create cultures of personal responsibility and winners in business and life.”

—**Dianna Booher**, author, *The Voices of Authority* and *Booher’s Rules of Business Grammar*

*To Lisa, Christopher, Hannah, Rebekah,
and Sarah*

*Thanks for your patience in letting me practice
and hone my leadership skills as I lead our
family. I love you all very much!*

LEADERSHIP RULES

**HOW TO BECOME
THE LEADER
YOU WANT TO BE**

Chris Widener

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— | INTRODUCTION | —

Every time I start writing a new book, I am reminded of Solomon's words: *Of the writing of books, there is no end.* I ask myself if there is really a purpose for writing the book that I am about to write. If there isn't, I don't.

Ultimately, I write a book because I want to help people learn something or be reminded of something. I love the old line from G. K. Chesterton that says that people need to be reminded more than they need to be instructed. This is where I spend most of my time: Reminding people. Most of the time I am not saying something new; rather I am reminding my readers of something they have probably heard already. My goal is to remind them, often in a fresh way through a unique story, of the truths that govern successful living.

Simplicity is the key to success. Success isn't brain surgery. As I write a book about leadership, I am even more convinced than ever that leadership is simple. It is hard, but it is simple.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership Rules is about the simplicity of leadership. If you want to lead people, if you want to influence people and move them toward a common goal—whether it is a family, a business, or a football team—a few simple rules will form the foundation for that leadership.

One last thought. I use the word *rules* very specifically. It is human nature to want the easy answer, the silver bullet. We don't want the rule, we want the law. The problem is that with human behavior, which leadership is completely beholden to, there is no one way. There are no laws that govern human behavior. Neither I nor anyone else can tell you that if you do thus and so, it will work all the time. That just isn't so. Human behavior is extraordinarily complex.

And there's the rub. It is complex, *and* it is simple. If you have a group of a thousand people that you lead, you have tens of thousands of variables that are taking place in their lives that shape them and the way they will respond to your leadership. It is entirely impossible to fully meet the problem of complexity as you attempt to lead. Yet the good news is that there are a few simple

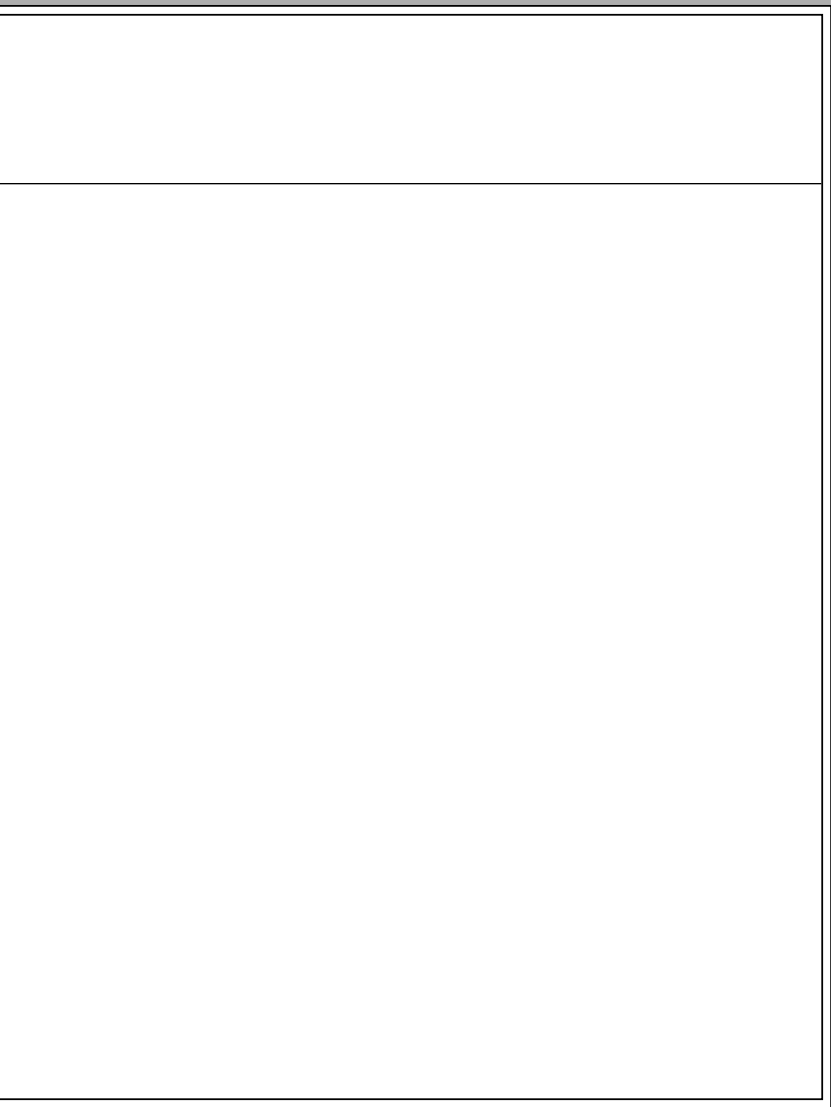
rules that, if followed, will meet the needs of most of the people, most of the time.

In the following pages, I hope to remind you of some simple truths that will take you a long way in working with people and becoming a great leader. They will not work all of the time: people will fail, and even those closest to you will disappoint you from time to time. But if you implement these leadership rules you will become a better leader. You will gain a deeper influence in the lives of more people. And that will take you—and them—much further down the road of success.



PART ONE

**THE
STORY**



CHAPTER 1



It is such a unique sound, the crunch of gravel under tires. That's the sound Mike Keller heard, and he didn't like it much.

It wouldn't have been so bad except that it was his driveway. His new driveway. The driveway to the house he wished he wasn't moving into. Born and raised in Chicago, he had no desire to live in Texas—but here he was, the newest resident of East Creek, Texas, about an hour outside of Dallas. To him, it might as well have been an hour out of Podunk.

What in the world am I doing here? he thought as he and his son Billy drove down the short driveway to the three-bedroom rambler he'd rented sight unseen. The one thing he did like about the house was that it was cheap, cheap, cheap. Especially compared to what housing cost in Chicago.

As the car rolled to a stop, Mike and Billy took in the scene. The paint was chipping, and one of

the window screens was falling out. The screen door on the front entrance was swinging back and forth in the wind. The front yard didn't have a shred of green left in the grass. *Yep, this is Texas in August, all right.*

“Well son, here we are.”

“Yep. . . . Here we are.”

Billy's resignation was obvious. The kid had been no more pleased than you could expect about being pulled away from his friends in high school, but he'd been a good sport about it, sticking by his choice to live with his father when his parents split up. Mike and Billy had been baching it for the last year or so, ever since Mike's wife, Kristy, had announced that she wanted a separation.

Maybe the distance will do us all some good, Mike thought. He and Kristy had been trying for a reconciliation but talking different languages, and Mike's job at Markston Machine Corporation had been going poorly on top of it. The stress had been so bad, anything might be an improvement. Mike opened the car door and stood up, feeling like he'd stepped into an oven. “Let's leave the stuff in the car for now, son, and get the lay of the land in the

house first.” The movers would be there the next day, but Mike and Billy had brought down a carload of things to make the place barely habitable.

“Okay,” Billy replied.

They hurried up the cracked walkway. Mike stuck the key in and opened the door. “Our new domain,” he said.

It was musty inside. Very hot. Cobwebs in the corners. They tried the window air conditioner, but it just sputtered, making about twice as much noise as cold air.

“I’ll open some windows,” Billy said. “It’s worse in here than outside.”

“Good idea.” *I’ll have to buy an air conditioner*, Mike thought. *Or three.*

The two of them just stood there in the middle of the empty living room, dripping sweat. “I know this is tough, son,” Mike said as he pulled Billy into a hug. “We’ll make it, though. Everything happens for a reason, and we just have to figure out what the lesson is here.”

“I know.”

“You know, there is an old quote I like. When the student is ready, the teacher will appear. Let’s be ready for what we are supposed to learn here.”

“What do you suppose it is, Dad?”

“I have no idea, son, no idea whatsoever.”
Mike was feeling as lost as he ever had. Wondering how to save his marriage, how to recoup his failing career, how to be what he had always hoped he would be.

It had been a month since Tom Markston, the third-generation CEO of Markston Machine, had called Mike into his office. The conversation was a blur. Mike figured out quickly it wasn't good and only caught bits and pieces of it:

Things aren't working out here . . .

We thought you would be better prepared . . .

The fast-track option to leadership isn't going to happen here . . .

We think you need to relearn a few things . . .

You will be reassigned to the plant in . . . East Creek, Texas. . . .

Next thing they knew, Mike and Billy were in Texas. Mike had been demoted to the East Creek plant. It had been in the company for forty years, doing a lot of machine work that got distributed throughout the country. It was a small but integral part of the overall mission of MMC, but Mike knew