

# So To SPEAK



## Timeless leadership principles

By Jim Clemmer, Kitchener, Ontario

While interviewing the legendary Jack Nicklaus, a reporter once remarked, "Jack, you have had a spectacular career. Your name is synonymous with the game of golf. You really know your way around the course. What is your secret?" Nicklaus replied, "The holes are numbered!"

If only leadership were so easy. (Given the sad state of my game, I'm the last person who should use "easy" and "golf" in the same sentence!) Of course, there are no handily numbered steps that we can follow in developing our leadership. But after decades of studying leadership—of writing and speaking about it, trying to practise it, and coaching thousands of managers in it—I am convinced that there are timeless leadership principles which we can all use to be more effective in our personal and professional lives.

In the late 1990s, I published my fourth leadership book, *Growing the Distance: Timeless Principles for Personal, Career and Family Success*, now approaching 100,000 copies in print. The response to the book and its leadership principles was so strong that I continued to develop them. That led to my newest—just published—companion book, *The Leader's Digest: Timeless Principles for Team and Organization Success*.

A recent search on Amazon.com revealed that there are over 10,000 leadership books in print! There are as many different interpretations of "leadership" as there are people using the term. The result is a confusing multitude of leadership grids, charts, formulas, jargon, fads, and buzzwords, with new ones popping up every week. An occupational hazard of this business is that we chase after what's new rather than what works. We look for fashionable rather than enduring principles.

Most of my audiences are very experienced middle to senior managers in medium to large organizations who don't need to be educated or informed as much as they need to be reminded, inspired, reinforced, or shown different ways of applying familiar leadership principles.

Historians, anthropologists and scholars of classic literature tell us that there are really quite a small number of recurring stories in the entire history of humanity. Our books and movies provide us with endless variations on the basic stories of the human condition, and the same themes keep showing up in the stories of people and cultures thousands of years or miles apart. Enduring leadership principles are just as timeless. They aren't new. It is the timelessness of these principles that prove their value.

### Leadership needs management to fly

Both management and leadership are needed to make teams and organizations successful. In building our speaking, consulting, and training businesses, we also need a good balance of both management and leadership. Trying to decide which is most important is like trying to decide whether the right or left wing is more important to an airplane's flight. I'll take both, please!

A classic problem often comes up among entrepreneurial start-up companies with strong vision, passion and energy (leadership), and good technological or technical skills: their poor management discipline or lack of systems and processes lead to errors, poor service quality, and frustration for customers and people in the organization. In building our businesses, we need to couple our passion and creative spirit with disciplined processes and business management.

*Continued on reverse*

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## The leadership wheel

The most common weakness, however, is lack of leadership. Growing our leadership is a dynamic process. It begins at the centre of our being and develops in multiple directions. I use the "hub and spokes" model to depict the timeless leadership principles. (Both *Growing the Distance* and *The Leader's Digest* are built around it.)



Each part of the wheel corresponds to an area of leadership. At the hub of the wheel, we have the vision, values and purpose on which leaders effectively focus themselves and their teams or organizations (Focus and Context). Leaders also take initiative and do what needs to be done rather than waiting for someone else to do something (Responsibility for Choices). Leaders are authentic and lead by visible example, fostering openness and continuous feedback (Authenticity). Leaders are passionate and build strong commitment through involvement and ownership (Passion and Commitment). Leaders lead with heart and rouse team or organizational spirit (Spirit and Meaning). Leaders help people grow through strong coaching and continuous development (Growing and Developing). Finally, leaders energize people by building strong teams, inspiring and serving (Mobilizing and Energizing).

The leadership wheel model provides a metaphor for situations we face at personal, team or organizational levels. For example, just as a wheel's weight-bearing ability depends upon the strength of its hub, so does the strength of our hub determine the weight of the performance and change issues that we are able to carry.

The wheel also represents the circular nature of leadership: there is no beginning or end. All the supporting leadership principles around the outside of the Leadership Wheel are interdependent and interconnected. If we, our team or our organization develop these leadership skills, the wheel is well rounded. If we are deficient in one or more of these skills, the ride might be a little bumpy.

A key part of our continuous leadership quest is finding the approaches that fit our individual values, personality and style. No one leadership size fits all. It is like trying to find a path in a field of newly fallen snow. Once we walk across the field, we have discovered our path.

Jim Clemmer, CSP, is a member of the CAPS National Board. His business is a blend of keynote presentations, workshops, management retreats and consulting, with bestsellers including *The VIP Strategy*, *Firing on All Cylinders*, *Pathways to Performance*, *Growing the Distance*, and his new book, *The Leader's Digest*. Jim's website is [www.clemmer.net](http://www.clemmer.net).

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