



Practical Leadership:

Inspiring *Action*, Achieving Results

Jim Clemmer's Leader Letter

April 2004, Issue 133~ View on-line at www.clemmer.net

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Culture Change Starts with the Management Team

Culture change and development continues to be a major concern for many managers. For very good reason: Research shows that an organization's culture ("what we pay attention to and how we do things around here") is the key factor in determining performance.

But too many management teams approach "change management" as an issue of changing the way everyone else operates. They rarely understand that the culture of their whole organization or the "micro climate" of their division or department is most clearly defined by how the management team operates. The dynamics of the management team ripples outward to create the dynamics of the culture they lead.

I recently wrote a feature article on this topic, which ran in *The Globe and Mail*. It is full of tips, tools, and techniques for management team development. [Click here](#) to read it now:
http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/fix_managers.shtml

I was also interviewed on this topic, by [HR.com](http://www.hr.com), where I gave examples of my work with management teams. [Click here](#) to read the interview now:
http://www.clemmer.net/media/hrcom_intvw.shtml

The Power of Strategic Pessimism

Following is correspondence from *Leader Letter* reader, Ken Larson, in Calgary, Alberta. His insights and useful comments are in response to the article I wrote in last month's *Leader Letter*, entitled "Choosing My Perspective." ([click here to read it](#)).

Hi Jim,

Research on the The Positive Power of Negative Thinking by Julie K. Norem shows that there is a group of high achievers that are classed as traditional pessimists. However, these "pessimists" (by definition) use their pessimism to their benefit - they are strategic about it. Here's the deal...

- A strategic pessimist sees the negative in a situation, and then becomes motivated to make sure it doesn't happen.*
- A strategic optimist sees the positive in a situation, then becomes motivated to make sure it does happen.*



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- *Additional findings showed that when you try to convert a strategic pessimist to become more optimistic, they fail miserably. The opposite held true for strategic optimists trying the strategy of the strategic pessimists.*

Interesting? I have found this helps greatly in my executive coaching as it doesn't really matter if one is optimistic or pessimistic, as long as they are "strategic" about it, and stick to what works for them. I have found a lot of executives are relieved to hear this news (that they aren't 'bad') and then realize that they don't have to change, they just have to become more aware of it, use what works for them, but also be willing to shift to the other side when necessary (when they go home to the family?). This has huge ramifications for handling all sorts of situations. For example, I really want the mechanic on the airliner I fly on to be a strategic pessimist - find all that could go wrong and make absolute sure that it doesn't happen.

Thoughts?

Ken

Hi Ken,

Thanks for your interesting research and perspective.

I can see the value of strategic pessimism in many organizational situations. I can also see the times when it would make sense for personal situations. But the big danger in this concept is that it gives permission to pessimists to continue their sour outlook on life. Overwhelming research shows this leads to disastrous physical and mental results, not to mention broken relationships and other side effects.

There's an important distinction to be made between life pessimism and situational pessimism. That's where Seligman's 3Ps (permanent, pervasive, and personal) of explanatory style are the most helpful. I certainly agree that I want the airplane mechanic (or pilot) to be strategically pessimistic.

Jim

Jim,

You are absolutely correct - strategic pessimists don't allow their negative outlook on life to affect them. It is much closer to situational pessimism than life pessimism as you suggest - but perhaps a step further, in that they tend to look at the down side purely for the potential benefits of knowing what could go wrong as a means of better assessing the situation AND motivating them to achieve in spite of these.

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This lends itself to the notion that although we are all pre-disposed to a certain explanatory style, there is a great need in our present society to be able (and willing) to shift our outlook depending upon the situation, whether it be in life or business.

To me it all comes down to the element of perceived risk - when there is a lot, then a strategically pessimistic outlook will help (survival mechanism?) – as long as the emotions of the situation don't cloud our view and wear down our internal mechanisms (as the research shows to be true). This is both a talent as much as a skill.

I did my masters thesis on explanatory style. Believe me, the "Three P's" are etched into my brain for all eternity :) :) :).

Sorting Out the Muddle of Vision, Mission, Goal, Objective, and Purpose

A web site visitor from India recently e-mailed me this question:

To me 'Goal,' 'Objective,' 'Purpose,' and 'Mission' are synonymous. And 'Vision' is something beyond 'Mission.' If success is the 'Mission' then more-than-success is the 'Vision' for an organization. Am I correct? Please verify.

Here's my response:

Thanks for your question. This area can be very confusing. Below are two excerpts from my new book, *The Leader's Digest: Timeless Principles for Team and Organization Success*, that address your questions. You can [view more of the book and order it on our web site](#).

It wasn't by accident that we chose to arrange the timeless leadership principles in the shape of a wheel. Of all the principles, there is one that is central, one from which the others emanate, much as spokes radiate from the hub of a wheel. That core principle is Focus and Context. So what is this all-important principle? In fact, it consists of three interrelated parts, which are defined by the answers to three key questions:

1. Where are we going (the vision or picture of our preferred future or outcome)?
2. What do we believe in (our guiding values or principles)?
3. Why do we exist (our reason for being, mission, or purpose)?

These questions are about as simple as I can make them. And this is important, because they can become overly complicated. Over the years I've engaged in too many "vernacular engineering" debates with colleagues and management teams that get enmeshed in numerous definitions of visions, values, mission statements, and the like. Too often we are just splitting hairs (which, given my follicular challenges, is something I really can't afford to do) without really adding value to our understanding and application of the important leadership principles.



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So I usually try to reduce Focus and Context to its key components, using these terms: **Vision, Values, and Purpose.**

Managers set goals, leaders have vision

Just as the terms "management" and "leadership" are often used interchangeably, goals and visions are often perceived to be the same thing. They are not. While both are critical to success (and are therefore highly interconnected), the management act of goal-setting is quite different from the leadership act of visioning.

Goals	Vision
Appeals to our intellect	Engages our emotions
Results and timeframes	A desired future state
Builds a business case	Kindles a cause
Rational	Intuitive
Pushes performance	Inspires and aligns
Targets and objectives	Images and feelings
Solves problems	Imagines possibilities
Logical progression	Irrational "skyhooks"
Written	Verbal

Performance Management Versus Coaching

A new *Leader Letter* subscriber from South Africa wrote and asked for my views on performance management. Here's my reply:

My discussions about performance management are generally approached through coaching. A huge problem with many performance management systems is that they are nothing more than bureaucratic exercises that frustrate the person on the receiving end and are a great chore to the manager doing them. The original intent of getting manager and team member talking to each other about his or her performance is dead on. The execution is often lacking.

You can find a few references to coaching in my [February newsletter](#). I have written more extensively about coaching in my latest book, *The Leader's Digest: Timeless Principles for Team and Organization Success*. You can read an excerpt from the book that deals with coaching at http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/cultivating_lship.shtml. Another excerpt on growing others is on our web site at http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/growing_others.shtml

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Nominate a Hero Who's Making a Difference

I've long admired Carl Hiebert's photographic books, cherished his friendship, and been inspired by his triumph over personal tragedy (read an excerpt about Carl [here](#)) and selfless work in helping less fortunate people around the world. Carl is working on an inspiring new project to shine a well-deserved spotlight on Canadians who are really making a difference. He needs help finding them. Visit his new web site at www.canadiansmakingadifference.com to learn more and nominate a deserving hero. You'll help Carl, bring recognition to a deserving hero, and contribute to fighting the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Third World countries.

Thoughts that Make You Go Hmm...on Management Team Development**"I am because we are."**

- African proverb

"When you have conflict at the top, and it is handled dysfunctionally, it sends shock waves through the entire organization – not ripples, but shock waves. The senior team is, for better or for worse, the organization's model of what a high-performing team is. If your senior team operates in a dysfunctional manner not only does it cause disconnects and decision-making snafus, it also sets up a dysfunctional model for the organization to emulate and that's really the worst problem."- Howard Guttman, author of *When Goliaths Clash***"While the first words and actions of leaders are the most closely attended to, the scrutiny never really ends. Followers continue to pay close attention to even the most offhand remark, and the more effective the leader is, the more careful he or she must be, because followers may implement an idea that was little more than a passing thought."**

- Warren Bennis, leadership researcher and author

"Customers who consider our servers rude should see the management."

- Sign in a restaurant

"Conventional wisdom's view of teamwork is dangerously misleading. Great managers do not believe that a productive team has camaraderie as its cornerstone and team members who can play all roles equally well. On the contrary, they define a productive team as one where each person knows which role he plays best and where he is cast in that role most of the time."- Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman, *First, Break All The Rules: What The World's Greatest Managers Do Differently*



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"Frontline staff are natural mimics, they act like their management team despite all attempts to train them otherwise."

- Unknown

Improvement Points Subscribers' Top Picks for March

Of all the short quotes with links to full articles that were e-mailed out as complimentary **Improvement Points** last month, the most popular with subscribers were:

"In a time of drastic change it is the learners who inherit the future. The learned usually find themselves equipped to live in a world that no longer exists." — Eric Hoffer, American philosopher, *Reflections on the Human Condition*

- from *Always on the Grow*

www.clemmer.net/excerpts/always_grow.shtml

"Reward systems and recognition practices speak volumes about your organization's values. Are they designed and delivered to employees - or with them? Do they reflect a management view of "we know what's best for you?" Are they partial and piecemeal or part of a larger system and philosophy?"

- from *How To Make Effort Rewarding*

www.clemmer.net/excerpts/effort_rewarding.shtml

"Reputation is what people think I am. Personality is what I seem to be. Character is what I really am. Our goal should be to break down the barriers between the three until they are one."

- from *Test Your Career Health*

www.clemmer.net/excerpts/test_career.shtml

Subscribe or view the archives by topic area here: www.clemmer.net/improvement.shtml.

Practical Leadership Strategies for Peak Performance

There is only one other public session scheduled for this new workshop. This two-day workshop combines the personal development approaches of *Growing the Distance: Timeless Principles for Personal, Career, and Family Success* using those same principles in leading others as outlined in my new book, *The Leader's Digest: Timeless Principles for Team and Organization Success*. Entitled **Practical Leadership Strategies for Peak Performance**, I have extensively updated, revised, and added to this material for this practical application workshop. [Click here for registration and an overview](#) (text and/or audio) of what we'll cover in **Practical Leadership Strategies for Peak Performance**.

If you would like to explore customized, in-house adaptations of this material for your team or organization, drop me an e-mail at Jim.Clemmer@Clemmer.net.



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Leading a High Performance Culture

[Supply Chain Logistics](#) will be hosting a unique, one-day workshop on June 3rd in Toronto, on balancing processes and people. I will be outlining key management processes and leadership principles and Supply Chain Management President, Don Borsk, will showcase his company's powerful application of them. We'll combine theory with results "on the ground". [Click here for details and registration.](#)

I would love to hear from you on any of the discussions raised in this issue of the *Leader Letter*...or any other matters concerning my work. Of course, I especially welcome conversations exploring how I might help you or your team/organization with a keynote presentation, management team retreat, or workshop.

Send me an e-mail at Jim.Clemmer@Clemmer.net or call me directly at (519) 748-5968.

I hope to connect with you again next month!

Jim

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