



## Practical Leadership:

Inspiring *Action*, Achieving Results

### Jim Clemmer's Leader Letter

April 2005, Issue 25

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#### More Courageous Leadership Stories

In the February issue of the *Leader Letter* I led off with a section entitled "Courage is at the Core of Leadership" (to read it go to <http://www.clemmer.net/news/feb2005.html#courage>). I shared some of the key points on courageous leadership that I was incorporating into the new book I am currently writing. This book is my first business fable or fictional account of cowardice and courage in a once successful company that is now in big trouble.

I am enjoying the process of learning how to craft stories that -- I hope -- entertain, inform, and inspire. The book's cast of characters and scenarios is a compilation of many of the good and bad leaders I have worked with over the past three decades.

Last month I published some of the many *Leader Letter* reader responses I received on this short piece (to read them go to <http://www.clemmer.net/news/mar2005.html#courage>). Judging by the quantity and quality of e-mail messages, I obviously touched a nerve. Here's another great story on courageous leadership from a reader.

*Hi Jim,*

*I have read your item on courage and some of the responses. It has caused me to think again of something that happened to my father years ago when he worked for a large food processing company. What happened shaped our family significantly even though the specifics of the issue were never discussed in detail. I was in Grade 3 at the time (1963ish) not really aware of what happened. Both of my parents are gone now, and I am writing a memoir of their lives as a couple. This story plays a big role.*

*My father was Superintendent of Operations for the food company in Toronto. He was transferred to the U.S. head office in the mid 1950s and then back to Toronto in 1956. He was then transferred to another Canadian plant around 1959 - 60 and was in charge of operations there.*

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*The family version of the story is that he was angered over a plan by individuals higher in seniority/position than him, to 'water down the product.' He was upset at a plan to alter the recipe because it would affect quality and was dishonest. The response to his standing up and fighting this change was another transfer - to afternoon shift supervisor at a small plant in a small town. He worked that shift for 10 years – from the time I was in grade 3 to my final year of high school.*

*My parents were dropped from the "A" list of company social circles. People whom my father and mother thought were friends stopped contact. The result was depression for my mother. As the breadwinner with five kids my dad just continued going to work. In later years he always claimed, and I have no doubt he truly believed it, that the small town was the best thing that ever happened to him. He loved the little town, the big old house they purchased there, and the people.*

*Dad didn't play office politics. That would never have been his style. We were all proud of our dad but I don't think I put the word 'courage' and this episode in his life together. It was just a story we grew up with. He spoke up against what he thought was wrong. He paid for it in a significant way. But my dad also died knowing he did the right thing. He spoke up and had the courage of his convictions. That's something all of us kids can be proud of. What a legacy.*

*I think if we lack courage today in the work world, we can trace some of that back to a lack of 'doing what is right.' The line between right and wrong gets blurred. We look at some of the horrible examples today - Enron etc - and it feeds into the perception that many hold; in order to be 'successful' you need to blur the line. So, standing up and doing what is right is seen as foolish instead of courageous.*

*I felt compelled to write you and tell you about this. I know how I want to include this chapter of their lives in the book I am writing. Your item on courage made me think about this in a different light.*

*Thank you.*

**Kim (Dadson) Denstedt**  
**Guelph, ON, Canada**

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Kim's story inspired me to share a short scene I wrote last month for my emerging business fable with you. In this chapter, Pete, the book's central character, is half-heartedly attending a session on leadership (go figure; me including a leadership workshop chapter in my story!):

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*(The workshop leaders instructed the small groups at round tables) "Take a few minutes at your table to discuss what sort of fear holds you back from talking about issues you know need to be addressed."*

*Everyone at Pete's table looked at each other without speaking. The silence was getting uncomfortable. Finally an older man across the table from Pete broke the silence. "As I look back on my career, one of my biggest regrets is that I talked about problems out in the hallway or with a few colleagues in our offices after the meeting. But I didn't have the courage to raise the issue in the meeting when it really needed to be discussed. I guess I excused myself by rationalizing that I didn't want to rock the boat and jeopardize my job or next promotion. The financial pressure of raising kids, mortgages, and pursuing an ever higher lifestyle put me on a path that reduced my options and slowly silenced me into just going along. I didn't think that I could afford to speak up and live according to my true values." He paused to gather his thoughts. "I see now that it's far too easy to let our courage ebb as the tide of responsibility rises. I lost my passion and settled for the status quo. So I ended up sedating my youthful ideals with food, booze, and 'busyness'."*

*Whoa! This guy is pretty dismal and pathetic Pete thought. Life is about compromise. That's why it's better to keep your expectations low so you won't end up full of regrets like this gloomy old fellow. A couple of others at the table commented that he was being far too hard on himself. The man allowed that he may be, but he had a few working years left and was here to get some courage and approaches to start acting like a leader. "Now is the time to change the next five years," he asserted. "I am determined to finish my career by speaking up and speaking out."*

I welcome your stories and perspectives on courageous leadership and courageous conversations. Please e-mail me at [Jim.Clemmer@Clemmer.net](mailto:Jim.Clemmer@Clemmer.net).

**Still Time to Register!**  
**Public Workshop – Leadership, Change, and Personal Growth**

**Leading @ the Speed of Change**

There are still a few seats left in my upcoming two-day session, right here in my hometown, **Kitchener, Ontario, May 31 - June 1, 2005.**

In today's fast moving world, many managers are struggling with how to strengthen their leadership and how to help their team/organization successfully navigate change. My ***Leading @ the Speed of Change*** workshop has helped thousands of managers. You'll be inspired to action and provided with practical 'how to' steps that dramatically boost personal, team, and organization results. Check out details at [www.clemmer.net/events/lsc/lsc.shtml](http://www.clemmer.net/events/lsc/lsc.shtml)

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**Team Spirit: Cultivate the Culture**

One of my most popular *Globe & Mail* articles was the one published last December on what kills organization and team spirit and how to heal that spirit. *Leadership Excellence* magazine ran a condensed version of that article in their April issue. To read it go to [www.clemmer.net/excerpts/team\\_cultivate.shtml](http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/team_cultivate.shtml)

**More on... Searching for Purpose and Meaning**

Happiness research is showing that we can live our lives centered on pleasure, engagement, or meaning. The happiest are those people living a life of meaning.

Last month I responded to a reader's question about finding his purpose (read the message and my response at [www.clemmer.net/news/mar2005.html#call](http://www.clemmer.net/news/mar2005.html#call)). Following is a message from another reader that provides his experience and another perspective on this vital issue.

*Dear Jim;*

*I saw the plea for help in finding purpose in your latest Leader Letter. I have little great wisdom to offer but here are a couple of small contributions.*

*First, I will offer a quotation from an unknown source that my daughter has had posted in her room since she was a young teenager. It says: "The thing we want most is a secret that nobody can tell us." How painfully true this can be! I marvel that it took me so long to figure out and that my daughter seems to have figured this out much sooner than her poor old dad!*

*Secondly, I would encourage your reader to show perseverance. I wandered through many assignments in the first dozen years of my engineering career before I found a project that really turned my crank. Looking back, I had quite an attitude problem for many of these years which probably did not help my search. Even so the project found me. Fortunately along the way I also figured some other things out and my life has been a lot better since! Many times life seems to be a bit that way. Something we need/want finds us, rather than the other way around. The important thing is not to fret, not to give up, but to keep looking - even after you think you've found your dream. I've spent most of 15 years on my dream project and I really believe it is close to changing the world in a small way. If so, I suspect this means that now I need to find a new dream to chase. Sounds like I'll have to heed my own advice....I hate that part. ;-)*

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*Finally I'll note that a playful attitude can really help. I read an article (or heard it on the radio?) from Peter Gzowski's (a famous Canadian broadcaster) daughter shortly after he died. She recounted a conversation she had with him about how much trouble she was having in figuring out what she wanted to do with her life. He said words to the effect of, "Me too! Isn't it great!" I enjoy your articles.*

**A Higher Performing Performance Review System**

In response to last month's section on "Fixing Performance Review Systems: Most are a Disaster" (to read this article go to [www.clemmer.net/news/mar2005.html#fix](http://www.clemmer.net/news/mar2005.html#fix)), Sandy Wright sent the following message outlining what sounds like a very good process that her organization has put together to deal with what is a bureaucratic mess in most organizations.

I thanked Sandy for sharing her experience and asked her permission to publish her message. However, I warned her that readers of *The Leader's Digest* know that I have a real thing against the term "human capital" (read a short book excerpt outlining my issue with this and related terms at [www.clemmer.net/excerpts/leaders\\_invest.shtml](http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/leaders_invest.shtml)). She said their organization has also struggled with the term and were looking for alternatives. I suggested they consider "People Development" or just the "People" department as Southwest Airlines and Wal-Mart uses. Looking past my aversion to calling people "human capital," what Sandy describes adds a useful insight to the performance management conundrum faced by many managers.

*Hi Jim,*

*I enjoy reading your Leader Letter. Many of your topics are at the heart of the issues we've tackled in our division. Recently, we had the results of the staff survey which our organization runs every two years and uses as a measurement of human capital.*

*My particular division had an engagement score of 88% with 97% of our staff responding to the survey. Naturally we're over the moon at such a result but our score has been steadily improving over the last 6 years and is no accident. We invested in the business through system enhancement, risk procedures, and staff development.*

*Four years ago we implemented an online performance management system which requires staff to fill out first, and then managers add comments, a face to face discussion is held and the manager signs off. Staff members have final sign off and comment with the final report recording both views - staff and manager's to provide transparency and accountability. The elements of the appraisal include competency and behavioral evaluation, goal setting, overall ratings, 180 degree basic feedback on the manager and a development plan. Many performance issues have largely disappeared as a result.*

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*But we didn't stop there. We embarked on management training and a ten month leadership training program out of which developed a vision and purpose for our division - we already had a strategy (not financial) with the client at the centre. Financial goals are seen as means to an end (our purpose), not the end. The hard measures of turnover and profit are proof of the wisdom of a holistic approach. Turnover is down and we've achieved record profit every year for the last three and we're planning to double our profit in three years - for which we are on track.*

*It is a privilege and immensely satisfying as a Human Capital practitioner to be working in this division - effective leadership has made the difference.*

**Sandy Wright, Human Capital Director, Banking Division, Macquarie Bank Limited**

**Leadership Starts Here**

*Jim,*

*I have been browsing your newsletters for some time now. I finally took the time today to really dig into some of your information. It hasn't been easy, the longer I read the more depressed I became!*

*I work for the largest private corporation in America. They have some fantastic leaders at the top and a Mission Statement that has been developed over time and not just some flowery combination of words or a buzz statement. I am not in one of the "high end" business units and sometimes things take a little longer to roll down hill. I have been challenged with leading our quality group in an engagement process which is a measurement of how well the slow rolling things are being understood and put to use.*

*The more I read about leading people as opposed to managing people the more I began to ask myself if we will ever see those great leaders at our level. I finally got to the passion, commitment, spirit and meaning quotes.*

*Isn't it always the case, that when you start to talk about these things we all end up on the same playing field!? We will always be just what our own spirit and passion allows us to be or become – regardless of those outside influences or who the captain of the team is!*

*Keep up the good work and thanks for your newsletters.*

**Ed Wanlass  
Grantsville, UT**

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Hi Ed,

Thanks very much for your message. I really appreciate you taking the time to tell me how my work has affected you. Of course, my books are even better! :)

I am especially gratified to see how you're grasping the essence of leadership. Far too many people spend their time complaining and wishing for someone else (usually higher in their organization) to show leadership. It's great when it happens, but it's so unpredictable. Leadership is about taking control of our own world and leading from the inside out. Ultimately our own passion and spirit will determine our own effectiveness and happiness. We truly are the captain of our own team. It's such an obvious and basic idea and yet so difficult for so many people to grasp - or take personal responsibility for.

Jim

**Change Checklist**

*Hi Jim,*

*Our senior managers need to have a short handy reference on what they must be thinking and doing about the human side of the change/transition process. In the swirl of business pressures, impossible deadlines and no budget, lengthy articles or workshops don't meet our needs.*

*I am now working on producing a "Managers' Checklist -- the Human Side of Change." But it strikes me I am not the only over-taxed organization development professional who would love to have a template for this sort of thing.*

*"What indication do you have that most of your employees recognize the need for some kind of change?" would be a checklist item. If the senior manager is confident the staff are ready for change, then s/he would write a simple list of indicators. If not, there would be a second level where the manager could access 'sample' indicators.*

*When thinking about the leadership expert who produces simple, powerful usable ideas your name sprang immediately to mind. I don't know if this is a profitable notion, but thought I'd simply suggest it to you. In the meantime, if you happen to know of any existing sources for a "Change Checklist," I would appreciate knowing about them.*

**Joe**

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Hi Joe,

Thanks for your message. You and I are thinking alike! I designed the kind of checklist you're talking about when I wrote *Pathways to Performance* (check out the book at [www.clemmer.net/books/ptp.shtml](http://www.clemmer.net/books/ptp.shtml)) ten years ago. You can view an interactive and updated version of its "Transformation Pathways" on our web site at [www.clemmer.net/oassess/tranpath.shtml](http://www.clemmer.net/oassess/tranpath.shtml). The checklist excerpted from *Pathways to Performance* is at [www.clemmer.net/excerpts/change\\_checkpoints.shtml](http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/change_checkpoints.shtml). I hope this is helpful to you.

Jim

**Refusing to be Victimized by a Bad Boss**

Following are selected excerpts of a series of e-mail exchanges I had with a reader of my books and articles. It's a great example of having the self-esteem, and mustering the courage, to do all you can to change your job situation (some of those details have been left out of this summary). And when you've done all you can and haven't been able to change your situation; you need to change your job.

*I am currently working in a very toxic environment...Husband/wife/son and anyone else that is related...not good for business, but not my call...*

*How can it be that you are the only one who is willing to speak out about ineffective (bad) management? I have spent the past number of years thinking I am crazy or unemployable....knowing in my heart that the people in management are my biggest obstacle because they are too worried about their own jobs to recognize a potential asset to their company.... What a waste of the last 20+ years of my life.... Is there anybody out there who is interested in, (or looking for) a super bright, intelligent, accomplished woman who is willing to give her all to a company that gives something (however small) in return?*

*My friend started sending me some of your articles. Your writing has confirmed what I knew all along....that I'm not crazy and that not every manager is a good manager. I am now reading your articles to find coping skills until I can find another job '-)*

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There are more bad managers than good ones. But there are also some exceptionally good managers around. They are just hard to find. Many well-run organizations are populated with a large number of good managers. But even there, a number of poor managers can exist. And there are also lots of cases of managers providing strong leadership to their own teams despite the more toxic environment or poorly run organization they are living in.

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Don't consider that you've wasted 20 years of your life. During that time, you've become much clearer about what you really want in a manager, organization, and your job. If you haven't already, I'd encourage you to get very clear about your own core strengths and values. Then look for a job that aligns with those, and an environment and manager that support the things you want, in order to bring out the best in you.

You might also want to take a look at the growing skill/mind set of "upward leadership." This means that if you do find yourself in a job and organization you like but with a bad boss, don't be a victim. Take control your own situation and learn how to manage your manager. You can find a large selection of free articles and excerpts from my last two books, *Growing the Distance* and *The Leader's Digest* around the theme of taking responsibility for our lives and choices at [www.clemmer.net/excerpts/responsibility.shtml](http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/responsibility.shtml).

Jim

**Top Improvement Points from March**

Of the short quotes with links to full articles that were e-mailed out as complimentary **Improvement Points** (you can find these at <http://www.clemmer.net/improvement.shtml>) last month, the most popular with subscribers were:

**"Strong leaders engage people's hearts. They build ever-deeper passion and commitment. The key leadership word is "care." When we care about our work, we will often be harder on ourselves than anyone else would dare to be. When we really care about the customers we serve, we'll go out of our way to ensure that each "moment of truth" (contact with customers) is as positive as we can make it. When we care about making our organization successful, we'll go above and beyond our job to do whatever it takes to be part of a winning team. When we care about our products or services, we'll do whatever it takes to continue feeling proud of what we do."**

- from [Leaders Foster Individual Passion for Change and Improvement](http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/leaders_foster.shtml)  
[www.clemmer.net/excerpts/leaders\\_foster.shtml](http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/leaders_foster.shtml)

**"The emotional tone or spirit of a team or organization is vital to its success. The will to win, to excel, or to make a difference, is often what defines high performance in just about any human endeavor. It's one of those mighty forces that can't easily be counted, but creates the results that count."**

- from ['Meaning-Full' Work](http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/meaning_full.shtml)  
[www.clemmer.net/excerpts/meaning\\_full.shtml](http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/meaning_full.shtml)



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**"When things go wrong, weak managers too often try to fix the blame rather than the problem. They point fingers and lay guilt rather than take responsibility, seek out root causes of problems and fix them."**

- from [Bridging the Credibility Gap](http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/credibility.shtml)  
[www.clemmer.net/excerpts/credibility.shtml](http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/credibility.shtml)

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#### **Thoughts That Make You Go Hmmm...on Being True to You**

**"Truth always originates in a minority of one, and every custom begins as a broken precedent."**

- Lady Nancy Astor, *English politician and first female member of the British Parliament*

**"Your only obligation in any lifetime is to be true to yourself."**

- Richard David Bach, *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*

**"People are like stained-glass windows. They sparkle and shine when the sun is out, but when the darkness sets in, their true beauty is revealed only if there is a light from within."**

- Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *psychiatrist, author and "teacher of life"*

**"Never follow somebody else's path; it doesn't work the same way twice for anyone...the path follows you and rolls up behind you as you walk, forcing the next person to find their own way."**

- J. Michael Straczynski, *American writer and producer*

**"Don't let your special character and values, the secret that you know and no one else does – the truth – don't let that get swallowed up by the great chewing complacency."**

- Aesop, *Greek fabulist*



**JIM CLEMMER**

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#### **Feedback and Follow-Up**

I am always delighted to hear from readers of the *Leader Letter* with feedback, reflections, suggestions, or differing points of view. I am also happy to explore customized, in-house adaptations of any of my material for your team or organization, drop me an e-mail at [Jim.Clemmer@Clemmer.net](mailto:Jim.Clemmer@Clemmer.net).

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I hope to connect with you again next month!

Jim

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