



Practical Leadership:

Inspiring Action, Achieving Results

Jim Clemmer's Leader Letter

January 2006, Issue 34

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Happy New Year!

As another year clicks by and change marches on, this is the perfect time to have a change checkup. My most popular (by a long shot) keynote presentation, workshop, and management retreat is "Leading @ the Speed of Change: Aligning People, Processes, and Personal Effectiveness for Continuous Success." This material continues to evolve through numerous books, workbooks, consulting, presentations, and sessions.

Having delivered my "Leading @ the Speed of Change" program hundreds of times as a keynote, workshop, or management team retreat, following are what continuously emerges as the key learnings. You might want to use this as a personal checklist as you look at the year ahead and think about continuing your own growth and development:

- ❖ When faced with difficult change or adversity, less effective people slip down into Victim mode and often take up residence in Pity City. Many people sit in the more neutral "wait and see" territory of Survivor mode waiting for someone else to help them decide whether to react positively or negatively. Strong leaders may dip into the other modes temporarily but fight emotional gravity and stay up in Navigator mode. They find a way to move themselves and others forward.
- ❖ Navigating leaders help their teams to navigate difficult change by:
 - ◆ Building a series of small wins
 - ◆ Reinforcing progress and success
 - ◆ Fostering high participation and involvement
 - ◆ Engaging emotional commitment
 - ◆ Continuous coaching and development
 - ◆ Not giving power to cynics and naysayers
 - ◆ Leading by clear personal example
 - ◆ Challenging and reframing negative explanatory styles
 - ◆ Allowing people time to vent frustrations but cutting off "victim speak" before it paralyzes the team
- ❖ Many managers spend far too much time on technical and management issues and not enough time leading. Today's 24/7 "always on and always connected" world is making this busy-ness trap far worse.
- ❖ Managers intuitively know that Emotional Intelligence is critical to their success. But few take the time to assess their levels of EQ and develop an ongoing action plan to continuously strengthen it.

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- ❖ There are far too many Moose-on-the-Table (issues everyone sees but are choosing to ignore) because managers often don't know how to address them.
- ❖ Leadership is often considered being in charge or influencing peers. The most effective managers are also strong at upward leadership of their boss or more senior people.
- ❖ We often fall into the trap of looking for what's new and trendy in leadership techniques and don't spend enough time understanding and applying what works.

These are some of the issues we'll be covering in the only public "Leading @ the Speed of Change: Aligning People, Processes, and Personal Effectiveness for Continuous Success" workshop I'm doing in 2006. To get more information, go to: <http://www.clemmer.net/events/lsc/lsc.shtml>.

Customized in-house versions of the "Leading @ the Speed of Change" workshop are very effective because they are tailored to your team or organization. Contact me or Heather if you'd like to explore booking one at: <http://www.clemmer.net/contact.shtml>.

Thoughts That Make You Go Hmmm...on Leadership and Change

"Leadership...is about coping with change. Part of the reason it has become so important in recent years is that the business world has become more competitive and more volatile. ...doing what was done yesterday, or doing it 5% better, is no longer a formula for success. Major changes are more and more necessary to survive and compete effectively in this new environment. More change always demands more leadership."

- John Kotter, "What Leaders Really Do," *Harvard Business Review*

"All things change when we do."

- David Whyte, *The Heart Aroused: Poetry and Preservation of the Soul in Corporate America*

"Superior leaders get things done with very little motion. They impart instruction not through many words, but through a few deeds. They keep informed about everything but interfere hardly at all. They are catalysts, and though things would not get done as well if they were not there, when they succeed they take no credit. And because they take no credit, credit never leaves them."

- Lao-Tzu

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"If you don't like the way the world is, you change it. You have an obligation to change it. You just do it one step at a time."

- Marian Wright Edelman, American writer

"Old leaders can learn new tricks. Leaders can and do make significant, in some cases life-altering, changes in their styles that ripple into their teams and trigger important changes throughout the entire organization."

- Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis & Annie McKee, *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence*

Special "Leading @ the Speed of Change" Presentation in Winnipeg, February 2, 2006

The Winnipeg Chapter of the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers is hosting an evening with me presenting my most popular keynote presentation, "Leading @ the Speed of Change." The presentation will be from 7:00 - 9:00 p.m. on February 2 at the Clarion Hotel (I am in town working with a Client the next morning). We get started at 6:00 p.m. with a "meet and greet." I will have copies of my books and other leadership resources available at steep discounts. Autographs will be no extra charge!

For more information go to: <http://www.capswinnipeg.ca/meetings.html>

I do very few public sessions like this (I did one in Halifax last year). If you live in Manitoba or happen to be in Winnipeg on February 2, I hope to see you there!

Looking in the Accountability Mirror

Recently I delivered a short workshop for the staff and managers of a small organization. The head of the company wanted a focus on accountability. Based on the session and my follow up discussions with him, he seemed to be falling into the common trap that snares so many managers on this vital issue.

My experience with organizations trying to improve accountability is that the issue is always multi-layered, complex, and interwoven with each company's unique culture and leadership style. Accountability is usually a symptom carrier for deeper organizational issues. Often managers are frustrated that people in the organization don't "get it" or don't "step up to the plate" and take more responsibility for problems, issues, plans, or projects. But just like the decades of solid research on sources of quality or customer service problems, most accountability challenges are rooted in organizational systems, processes, or structure. This is often called the 85/15 rule (not to be confused with Pareto's 80/20 Principle) since that's about the ratio of causes that are rooted in the organization's systems, processes, or structure versus individuals who are poor performers or unaccountable.

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Ironically, many managers want staff to take more accountability when they fail to hold themselves accountable for the systems, processes, or structures (the tools) they give everyone to use. The 85/15 Rule is a management mirror that great leaders are willing to look into while most managers would rather look elsewhere (often that's victim behavior - blaming staff for accountability problems).

If you'd like to read more perspectives on accountability, leadership, and organizational culture here are links to a few articles:

http://www.clemmer.net/media/hrcom_intvw.shtml

http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/leaders_first.shtml

http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/beyond_lip.shtml

I'd love to get your thoughts and experiences on dealing with the accountability issue. Please send me an e-mail at Jim.Clemmer@Clemmer.net.

Consultants Can Help or Hinder Strategic Planning

A journalist recently asked about the role of independent consultants in strategic planning. Here are a few quick thoughts on my experiences as an independent consultant helping organizations with strategic planning:

- ❖ Many independent consultants create disasters for organizations and sully all our reputations. Like incompetent physicians, they make people sicker. ***Competent*** independent consultants can play a critical role in helping management teams through strategic planning. But they must be strong enough to challenge the executive team, skilled in dealing with team conflict, seen as credible and authoritative in leadership and management, good at balancing the role of presenting ideas/approaches/management concepts and facilitating discussion within the group, and highly experienced in dealing with powerful executive personalities who try to take over or circumvent the process.
- ❖ Strategic planning has failed in 50 - 70% of cases because it's too rigid and focused on planning rather than executing. What ultimately matters is the organization or executive team's actions, not all the good intentions found in a planning document. Most management teams are horrible with following through and following up as they get consumed by daily crisis and operational issues.

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- ❖ An organization's effectiveness ripples out from the management group leading it. Very few management groups are powerful and effective teams. Most management groups are at best mediocre and at worst dysfunctional. Despite the retreats, labels, or team talk, they aren't really a team, but a collection of executives who meet occasionally. That team weakness plays out in weak implementation of expensive plans that may be very well thought through and look great sitting on a shelf.

Here are a few other articles or book excerpts I have written on this topic:

Why Most Change Programs and Improvement Initiatives Fail

Some change and improvement efforts have been hugely successful, others have been somewhat successful, and some ended up in the swamp. In reviewing the results, it is clear that a core number of execution problems or failure factors are common to all of the team, organization, and individual improvement efforts.

To read this article go to: http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/why_mostchange.shtml

Improvement Planning Pathways and Pitfalls (Two Parts)

Discover the Improvement Planning approaches that can help you to avoid the pitfalls and pave your organization's pathway to success.

To read Part One of this article go to: http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/ip_pathways1.shtml.

To read Part Two of this article go to: http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/ip_pathways2.shtml.

Culture Change Starts with the Management Team

When change fails, it can almost always be traced to dysfunctional leadership.

To read this article go to: http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/fix_managers.shtml.

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Harnessing the Power of Recognition, Appreciation, and Celebration*Jim,*

Your web site is one of the few places I have been able to find quality information on the correlation between strong leadership and the ability/willingness to appreciate and recognize the efforts of the whole team. In the nonprofit sector, appreciation plays an especially important role since pay is typically lower and employees are more driven by the service aspect of the job. There is a high turnover rate in nonprofits, and I find that many managers (in their own situation of being overworked and feeling unappreciated) do not provide employees with the positive feedback they need and deserve.

*Thank you for your work!**With appreciation,*

**Susie Bowie, Program Associate
Community Foundation of Sarasota County, Florida**

I certainly appreciate Susie's appreciation! I have written fairly extensively about the power of recognition, celebration, and appreciation to inspire people in their team or organization. It's such a critical leadership skill that I even designed and deliver a half day workshop on the topic.

You can view and download a series of my articles and book excerpts on recognition, appreciation, and celebration at <http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/reward.shtml>. You can also peruse about two dozen Improvement Points on recognition at <http://www.clemmer.net/quotes/reward.shtml> (when you're there, click on the link to read the longer article).

Here are a few key reminders that re-emerged recently during a discussion of this vital energy booster:

- ❖ Energizing leaders find numerous ways to hike energy and enjoyment levels by marking and celebrating milestones along the way. Strong leaders constantly search for ways to make change and improvement fun and rewarding. They know that the Laughter Index is a key indicator of the health and vitality of a team or organization.
- ❖ Continual change and constant improvement can be exhausting. That's why effective leaders break the endless improvement journey into a series of short exciting trips. A key element of that is celebrating and savoring successes. It's how effective leaders reenergize everyone to strive for the next goal.

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- ❖ Only two groups of people thrive on sincere recognition and genuine appreciation - men and women. Sincere recognition and genuine appreciation are highly energizing. Accomplishment and achievement should be our own reward for high performance. But it feels even better when other people notice and appreciate what we've done. Recognition and appreciation continually show up near the top of most lists of motivational factors. They are key sources of the fun and excitement, will to win, desire to belong, and passion so vital to continually improving performance.

United Kingdom or European Speaking or Workshop Opportunities

At the end of June, I am speaking at a leadership conference in Bristol, England. The session is organized for heads of colleges in the UK. Given the education sector, funding is tight and they can't afford to pay my full fees. I have agreed to participate because Heather is coming with me and we'll have a vacation as well.

However, I'd like to pick up another paid engagement or two while I am there. If you have been following my work and would like to explore me delivering a keynote presentation or tailoring a half, one or two day workshop or management team retreat, this could be the perfect chance for us to connect and see what we might be able to put together. This could be a great win/win opportunity since I want to expand my presence and business in Europe and your organization could save on travel costs.

If you might be interested in using my services while I am there, please contact me to explore the possibilities. I can send you outlines of the various keynote, workshop, and retreat topics I cover. If you refer me to an association or organization that books me, I'll give you a set of my latest leadership books, workbooks, new CD - and a thank you post card!

Please send me an e-mail at Jim.Clemmer@Clemmer.net.

"Drop Dead Money" Keeps Our Options Open

Last fall I did a series of American media interviews by phone and e-mail with the U.S. release of *Growing the Distance* (to read more about this book go to: <http://www.clemmer.net/books/gtd.shtml>) in bookstores across the country. A reporter working on a story of dealing with a bad boss asked, *"If you're deciding to quit your job, do you have a recommendation as to how many months salary you should have saved, and why that precise suggestion?"*

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Here's my response:

Depending upon the type of job, how senior it is, and the person's age, it can take from three to nine months to get a new job. So I'd recommend an absolute minimum of three months salary saved with nine months being ideal.

The more savings a person has the less beholden they are to a bad boss. Before I headed out on my own and had a regular job, I considered our savings our "drop dead" money. This was the fund that would allow me or my wife to tell any bad bosses to get lost and give us time to find a better opportunity (and boss). I had to use it once. Without this financial cushion, the chances of being exploited by a bad boss or getting stuck in a soul destroying job rut is much higher.

I have had a similar situation in our consulting company with a bad Client. This Client was incredibly demanding and very hard to work for because nothing was ever good enough. He also would arbitrarily reduce our invoices and not pay for all expenses or my full fees. Unfortunately, he provided over 50% of our fledgling little company's revenues during the very early years of trying to get The CLEMMER Group up and running. Fortunately, my wife and I had saved enough "drop dead money" to fire the Client and invest our time in finding much better ones. Not surprisingly, given the nature of this CEO and how he treated everyone who worked for him, a few years after we ended our relationship, his company went bankrupt. We have since developed a much better base of Clients.

Three Keys to Effective Coaching Conversations

A journalist asked for a few short and quick ideas on developmental communication between a manager and team member. These three came immediately to mind on this vital leadership skill:

- ❖ Managers often don't maintain a regular and ongoing dialogue or stream of continuous feedback on their team member's performance. So any corrective or negative feedback usually comes as a surprise and often feels like an ambush.
- ❖ The best feedback is balanced within three areas; what should the team member keep doing (reinforcing strengths is vital), stop doing (keep this to a couple), and start doing (drawing out his or her ideas is best).
- ❖ The conversation should focus on specific situations, issues or behaviors that the manager has observed. Avoid the common trap of generalizing ("you're always late, slow, etc."), repeating comments from others ("Fred just told me that you..."), labeling ("you have a bad attitude"), or guessing at intentions ("you just don't seem to care").

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Favorite Improvement Points from December

Improvement Points is a free service providing a key thought or quotation from one of my articles three times per week directly to your e-mail inbox (to subscribe go to: <http://www.clemmer.net/improvement.shtml>). Each complimentary Improvement Point links directly into the full article on our web site that spawned it. If you'd like to read more about that day's Improvement Point, you can choose to click through to the short article for a quick five-minute read. This is your opportunity for a short pause that refreshes, is an inspirational vitamin, or a quick performance boost. You can circulate especially relevant or timely articles or Improvement Points to your team, Clients, or colleagues for further discussion or action.

Here are my personal three choices of the Improvement Points we sent out in December:

"Use humor to build rapport and connect with people. Studies show that the most effective leaders use humor two to three times more often than their less effective (and more uptight) counterparts."

- from Jim Clemmer's article *Strong Leaders Use Language to Paint Word Pictures*
http://www.clemmer.net/excerpted/str_leaders.shtml

"Phrases like "head count" dehumanize and objectify people. We could really push this further and make the same argument for "human resources." Most of us want to be treated as a person, not a resource."

- from Jim Clemmer's article *Leaders Invest in Growing and Developing People*
http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/leaders_invest.shtml

"A study by J. Howard & Associates in a large insurance company found that 20% of managers that were seen as least inclusive ran the least profitable units. This contrasts with the 20% of managers considered to be the most inclusive who had units with 60% higher profitability. They also had lower turnover rates and higher customer satisfaction ratings."

- from Jim Clemmer's article *Engagement is an Inside Job*
<http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/engagement.shtml>



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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.

I hope to connect with you again next month!

Jim

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