JIM CLEMMER

Practical Leadership:
Inspiring *Action*, Achieving Results

Jim Clemmer's Leader Letter

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Reflections on Priority Overload

Here are some of the comments I received in response to last month's focus on priority overload (click to view the June issue).

I enjoyed your June letter and found some of the comments directly in keeping with my observations about overload and burnout.
- **Nancy Trammell, Director, Annuity Administration, Great-West Life & Annuity Insurance Co.**

I'm new in my industry & found reading your column on Priority Overload really hit home!
- **Jodi Tresidder, Relationship Manager, Flextrack**

The June issue of the Leader Letter *is outstanding and appropriate to what is now becoming an increasing part of my consulting practice. Despite being an M.S. degreed statistician, I am "blessed" (cursed?) with an INFP Myers-Briggs style. My work has evolved to at least 1/3 culture change/leadership retreats...and your materials are an integral part. I've been doing extensive work in the UK on their healthcare system and ALWAYS recommend your materials/web site/ improvement points, so I'm hoping you're noticing an increasing volume of e-mail traffic from the UK.*

I like your comments about the balanced scorecard. I've begun asking the question, "Is it a balanced scorecard or unbalanced rubbish heap of operational measures?"

I thought I would pass on a concept you alluded to that was "named" by a dear friend of mine, Faith Ralston (who has written a BRILLIANT book on emotions IN THE WORKPLACE. She calls it symptoms of "Corporate Craziness."

- *Lack of focus*
- *Obsession with technology*
- *Too busy to care*
- *Judgmental attitudes*
- *Indirect/Vague communication*
- *Too many closed-door conversations*
- *Too many/unproductive meetings*
- *Crisis-orientation*
- *"Blame" in reaction to mistakes*

- *Reactive budget processes*
- *Secretive decisions*

Our thinking is evolving in very similar ways and I think you would resonate with one of my favorite quotes from Joseph Campbell:

> *"When we talk about settling the world's problems, we're barking up the wrong tree. The world is perfect. It's a mess. It has always been a mess. We are not going to change it. Our job is to straighten out our own lives."*

I took that seminar from you at the 1994 Institute for Healthcare Improvement conference in Orlando when you were writing Pathways to Performance *and want you to know how much your writings have influenced me. And I can't thank you enough for your generosity in allowing me to put some of your materials on my web site. I do hope our paths cross again in the near future.*
Kind regards,
- Davis Balestracci, Portland, Maine

It's Often About Processes Not People

Experiences in the past few months are clearly trying to tell me to review the keys to process management in this issue. Problems with processes have featured prominently in a number of my workshops and management retreats this spring. Much of the ongoing consulting and organizational coaching work we're doing at The CLEMMER Group is currently centered on process management. Then I got a series of messages from Davis Balestracci connecting the priority overload problem (preceding article) with process management and reminding me of my heavy focus on this area in my book, *Firing on all Cylinders: The Service/Quality System for High-Powered Corporate Performance*.

Davis also quoted Steven Wright, "I suffer simultaneously from amnesia and deja vu. I have the feeling that I keep forgetting the same thing over and over again." That's a bit of how I have been feeling this spring as process management issues resurface. At times it was feeling to me that many managers have either once again forgotten just how critical process management is to their organization's effectiveness or they never really understood it in the first place. I am seeing evidence of both factors at work.

Here's more of Davis' message:

> *Jim, as I've reflected over the last 10+ years of my career, I have such gratitude for the day a good friend of mine told me "*Firing On All Cylinders *may just be the best book on quality*

that I have ever read." And, years later, it is still very relevant and hasn't dated much at all, especially your BRILLIANT paragraph on why "it's processes, not people"! Here's the paragraph I am referring to:

> Only about 15 percent of [problems] can be traced to someone who didn't care or wasn't conscientious enough. But the last person to touch the process, pass the product, or deliver the service may have been burned out by ceaseless [problem-solving]; overwhelmed with the volume of work or problems; turned off by a "snoopervising" manager; out of touch with who his or her team's customers are and what they value; unrewarded and unrecognized for efforts to improve things; poorly trained; given shoddy material, tools, or information to work with; not given feedback on when and how products or services went wrong; measured (and rewarded or punished) by management for results conflicting with his or her immediate customer's needs; unsure of how to resolve issues and jointly fix a process with other functions; trying to protect himself or herself or the team from searches for the guilty; unaware of where to go for help. All this lies within the system, processes, structure, or practices of the organization...
> - Jim Clemmer, *Firing on All Cylinders*

As a good "punch line" to your brilliant "process" paragraph, I also meant to pass on a humorous exchange between me and my boss at the time (a TRUE leader and the absolute FINEST human being I have ever met in my life). He was SO into NOT blaming people. And, one day, I "got" him. A middle manager in our organization made yet another bonehead decision that was going to have very serious consequences on the good, honest, decent, hard-working front-line staff. I was FURIOUS and he said to me, "Now, now, Davis, we mustn't blame people, we mustn't blame people," to which I replied, "OK, Rodney, I won't blame him, but I WILL blame the process that lets people like that get into those positions." And he agreed.

Thanks for the reminder, Davis. This spring also reminded me of another theme in *Firing on All Cylinders*; many managers are investing huge money in sales and marketing while blindly throwing money at technology and maybe a bit left over for training. Very little serious attention or investments are made in improving the organization's effectiveness. One of the big imbalances these days is all the marketing money plowed into branding. But if frontline staff isn't living the brand, customers raised expectations are dashed and their anger and cynicism grows. One of the biggest reasons frontline staff can't live the brand is because operational, service, order fulfillment, and other processes aren't working. In too many cases, organizations have purchased software systems that just mess things up faster. When I suggested to one management team during an offsite planning retreat that they need to map out their badly flawed order fulfillment process, they told me that had already been done. I asked who facilitated the project. We all managed to keep a straight face when they replied that the software vendor had helped them. And -- coincidentally -- the vendor had just the technical solution to "help" them! It was a disaster and brought the company to its financial knees.

Why Strategic Process Management

- Functional silos and chimneys create errors, delays, and waste.
- "Turfdom" and political maneuvering.
- Customers dance the bureaucratic shuffle ("that's not my department").
- E-commerce can showcase disjointedness to the world.
- Local/department/team sub-optimization.
- Communication, collaboration, and coordination problems.

Steps to Strategic Process Management

1. Define key strategic processes with inputs from suppliers and outputs to customers.
2. Map out how the process really works.
3. Track and analyze process performance.
4. Redesign the process to improve performance.
5. Monitor, follow-up, and continue process improvement as appropriate.

Process Management Pitfalls and Traps

- Jumping to step #4 without thoroughly defining, mapping, and analyzing.
- Poor customer/external partner data and input.
- Allowing opinions, power, and politics to override hard data.
- Frontline internal partners not involved.
- Processes narrowly improved at micro/departmental levels.
- Lack of senior managers' involved leadership.
- Misapplications of major reengineering versus incremental improvement.
- Weak training, ineffective approaches/templates.

Keys to Strategic Process Management

- Ensure that everyone involved in process management is well trained in these basic improvement tools:
    - Cause-and-Effect Diagrams
    - Check Sheets
    - Pareto Chart
    - Scatter Diagrams
    - Force Field Analysis
    - Flow Charting
    - Rating Chart
    - Macro Mapping
    - Histograms
    - Brainstorming
    - Run Charts
    - Affinity Diagram
    - Problem Solving/Decision Making Tools and Techniques

- Operate in a data-rich environment with lots of visible data, such as; diagrams, charts, and graphs for everyone to quickly identify issues, opportunities, and progress.

- Use outside experts to teach and guide internally owned and operated strategic process management. Don't let specialists, consultants, or software vendors do theoretical process reengineering or improvement in isolation and then slam-dunk it into the organization.

- Look for chronic problems that you're continually "fixing." These generally indicate that you haven't drilled down deep enough to the root causes and/or they are symptoms of broader process problems.

- Make process management part of a broader improvement planning infrastructure and process.

- Does your internal environment have high enough levels of trust and teamwork to support involved process management?

Further Information on Strategic Process Management

You can learn more about The CLEMMER Group experiences, perspectives, and approaches to Strategic Process Management at www.clemmer.net/process.shtml. The section entitled "Strategic Process Management: Optimizing Cross-Functional Performance" (part way down the page) provides the slides from our executive briefing overview of our approach.

You can also find five of my articles/excerpts on process management at www.clemmer.net/excerpts/process.shtml. Four of these are from *Pathways to Performance: A Guide to Transforming Yourself, Your Team, and Your Organization* and one is an older *Globe & Mail* column.

Thoughts That Make You Go Hmmmm…on Goals and Priorities

"The building blocks of corporate strategy are not products and markets but business processes. Competitive success depends on transforming a company's key processes into strategic capabilities that consistently provide superior value to the customer."
- George Stalk, Philip Evans, and Lawrence Shulman, "Competing on Capabilities: The New Rules of Corporate Strategy," *Harvard Business Review*

"The obvious is that which is never seen until someone expresses it simply."
- Kahlil Gibran, Syrian poet who migrated to America in 1910

"Out of intense complexities intense simplicities emerge."
- Sir Winston Churchill

"Any intelligent fool can make things bigger, more complex. It takes a touch of genius -- and a lot of courage -- to move in the opposite direction. "
- E. F. Schmacher, German economist and conservationist

"Particulars are not to be examined till the whole has been surveyed."
- Emanuel Celler, American lawyer and senator

"Again and again in business history, an unknown company has come from nowhere and in a few short years overtaken the established leaders without apparently even breathing hard. The explanation always given is superior strategy, superior technology, superior marketing, or lean manufacturing. But in every single case, the newcomer also enjoys a tremendous cost advantage, usually about 30 percent. The reason is always the same: the new company knows and manages the costs of the entire economic chain rather than its costs alone."
- Peter Drucker, *The Essential Drucker*

Practical Book Feedback

Since most readers of the *Leader Letter* have copies of my books (you are clearly a well read group), I thought you'd be interested in these two recent exchanges:

> *I ordered two of your books from a conference you gave in Kitchener, Ontario. I'm very busy balancing work with my wife and three young boys, so the short excerpt format was perfect. I was just at a five day training conference in Orlando, and I was talking to a trainee who was also a manager for his company. He had some problems with morale in his department, so I started to explain your Management vs Leadership model (click here to view the model www.clemmer.net/models/hperflship.shtml). I happened to have your book, The Leader's Digest, with me and I lent it to him to look at. The next day I could tell he was very impressed, so I told him to keep it. I think you've really explained these principles well, and in a way that people can instantly grasp. Congratulations on an excellent book - I have already ordered my replacement copy on-line.*
> **- Keith Harasyn, Quality Specialist, Invacare - Carroll Healthcare Division**

Hi Keith,

Thanks very much for your interesting story! I am always curious to know how my books get used and love to hear about word-of-mouth referrals like yours!

You may know that there is a *Practical Application Planner* that goes with *The Leader's Digest*. You can check it out at http://www.clemmer.net/books/tldpp.shtml.

Keep learning, laughing, loving, and leading – living life just for the L of it!

Jim

> *Hi Jim,*
>
> *I read* Firing on All Cylinders *several years back and although I no longer have it in my possession (since my boss at the time kept it), I found it probably the best book I've ever read dealing with the customer/vendor relationship. It was not only an easy read, but engaging. The everyday references given in the book certainly stuck. As a consumer, I look at my buying experience in a new way since reading the book. Thanks.*
> **- John Shultis**

Hi John,

Sounds like you need to get a new copy for yourself!

As you may know, I followed *Firing on All Cylinders* with *Pathways to Performance: A Guide to Transforming Yourself, Your Team, and Your Organization*. This book updated and reformed the "cylinders" model around a pathways metaphor. I also added the theme of "you can't change your team or organization into something you're not." So *Pathways to Performance* added a series of personal leadership development parallel pathways to the organizational ones. Working with that theme eventually led to *Growing the Distance: Timeless Principles for Personal and Career Success* using a "leadership wheel" as the central model for personal growth and leadership. The unusual magazine style format of *Growing the Distance* proved so popular (and somewhat controversial) that I used the same leadership wheel and format again when I wrote the companion book entitled, *The Leader's Digest: Timeless Principles for Team and Organization Success*. I then put together an extensive *Personal Implementation Guide* for implementing *Growing the Distance* and a *Practical Application Planner* for management teams to put *The Leader's Digest* into action.

So there you go. A brief history of what followed *Firing on All Cylinders!* Perhaps more than you ever want to know! You can check all of these out at www.clemmer.net/books.shtml.

Jim

Top Improvement Points from June

Of 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:

"Managers try to light a fire under people. Leaders stoke the fire within."
- from *Recharging With Recognition*
www.clemmer.net/excerpts/recharge_recog.shtml

"A father was late getting to his son's baseball game. As he sat down behind the players' bench he asked one of the boys known as a real leader on the team what the score was. "We're behind 14 to nothing," he answered with a smile. "Really!" the Dad replied. "I am surprised that you don't look very discouraged." "Discouraged?" the boy replied with a puzzled look on his face. "Why should we be discouraged? We haven't been up to bat yet."
- from *Leaders Inspire Their Teams With Optimism*
www.clemmer.net/excerpts/leaders_inspire.shtml

"Many managers are great at supplying information, but they're not so good at communication. This is, after all, the information age. Our organizational lives are overflowing with e-mails, voice mails, phone calls, newsletters, books, articles, manuals, and Web pages. But we suffer from a profound lack of communication. Too many managers over-inform and under-communicate."
- from *Speaking of Success: Informing versus Communicating*
www.clemmer.net/excerpts/speaking_success.shtml

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

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. Nobody is ever identified in the *Leader Letter* without their permission.

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.

Keep learning, laughing, loving, and leading -- living life just for the L of it!

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