

**Practical Leadership:***Inspiring Action, Achieving Results***Jim Clemmer's Leader Letter**

June 2006, Issue 39

Page 1 of 6

**In this issue...**

- **Who Is in Control of Your Time?**
- **Thoughts That Make You Go Hmmm...on Discipline**
- **More on Defining Organizational Values and Reinforcing a Service Code**
- **Are You Leading the Way to Higher Customer Service?**
- **Favorite May Improvement Points**
- **Managing Life's "Retirement" Transition**
- **Feedback and Follow-Up**

**Who Is in Control of Your Time?**

Many managers are getting sucked into an incredible vortex of busyness and daily fire fighting. It's becoming a bigger and bigger challenge to keep themselves and others focused and strategic in this 24/7, always-on, Blackberry culture. This is a large and rapidly growing problem that we are seeing in more and more organizations. When left unchecked, the problem leads to burnout, turnover, morale problems, frenzied everything-is-urgent wheel spinning, and poor execution.

In a *Harvard Business Review* article entitled "Beware the Busy Manager," Heike Bruch and Sumantra Ghoshal report on their ten years of studying effective and ineffective managers. "Managers will tell you that the resource they lack most is time...If you watch them, you'll see them rushing from meeting to meeting, checking their e-mail constantly, fighting fires – an astonishing amount of fast-moving activity that allows almost no time for reflection...Managers think they are attending to important matters, but they're really just spinning their wheels...Fully 90% of managers squander their time in all sorts of ineffective activities. A mere 10% of managers spend their time in a committed, purposeful, and reflective manner."

The problem has become so bad with some of our Clients that groups have established a ground rule to check their Blackberries at the door when entering meetings. Picture a row of identical Blackberries with Post-It-Notes identifying the owner with their red blinking message light flashing on the table beside the coffee pot.

Good for them! They recognize the problem and have acted on it. In other organizations, weak leadership and poor time and priority discipline are causing meetings and planning sessions to deteriorate in a complete waste of time as participants rudely check e-mail (many try to hide what they are doing while someone else is talking), take phone calls, and allow others to come in and pull them out of the meeting. It's a serious case of Attention Deficient Disorder that is dumbing down far too many groups. Research shows that multi-tasking reduces our ability to concentrate by 10 - 15 IQ points. That drop isn't something many of us can afford! Drops in group IQ must be two or three times that -- call it "unsynergy."



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June 2006, Issue 39

Page 2 of 6

#### **Thoughts That Make You Go Hmmm...on Discipline**

**"Talk is cheap because supply exceeds demand."**

Author Unknown

**"Discipline is crucial to achieve excellence. Discipline is at the heart of sustaining excellence in any field, and it is the essence of high-performing groups or single-unit leaders."**

Jon Katzenbach, author, researcher, and consultant

**"...much of this book is about creating a culture of discipline. It all starts with disciplined people... do you have a 'to do' list? Do you also have a 'stop doing' list? Most of us lead busy but undisciplined lives. We have ever-expanding 'to do' lists, trying to build momentum by doing, doing, doing-and doing more. And it rarely works. Those who built the good-to-great companies, however, made as much use of 'stop doing' lists as 'to do' lists. They displayed a remarkable discipline to unplug all sorts of extraneous junk."**

Jim Collins, *Good to Great*

**"Balancing is a discipline precisely because the act of giving something up is painful..."**

M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled*

**"I never could have done what I have done without the habits of punctuality, order, and diligence, without the determination to concentrate myself on one subject at a time..."**

Charles Dickens (1812-70), English novelist, fiction writer

#### **More on Defining Organizational Values and Reinforcing a Service Code**

In the April issue of the *Leader Letter* I published an e-mail from Ian, a facilitator looking for input on defining organizational values and reinforcing a service code (read Ian's e-mail and my comments [here](#)).

The following suggestions from a public sector reader (who asked to remain anonymous) are right on the mark. Working with unions or any other key constituents to strengthen trust is critical. So often the root cause of conflict between two people or groups of people is suspicion about the other person or party's "hidden agenda." The more we can discuss and agree on the core values that provide the glue to our relationship, the more we will stretch our tolerance and understanding for differing approaches. If I believe you believe in the same principles as I do and want to end up in a similar place, I'll work harder with you to reconcile our differences.

**Practical Leadership:***Inspiring Action, Achieving Results***Jim Clemmer's Leader Letter**

June 2006, Issue 39

Page 3 of 6

The second suggestion below is a useful perspective for dealing with the growing cynicism and "snicker factor" I wrote about in the April issue.

*"I saw nothing on union involvement in Ian's process - this is critical and perhaps was in place, but wasn't evident. After the last Public Service strike across the Federal Government, we may have been led to question each others' values. So, involve unions in this discussion - you don't want to be out of step."*

*"Personalize and involve - ask for examples of practices that have involved questionable judgment or uncertainty, then use those to assess the real impact of managing with your set of values. This is a tricky business, but critical in understanding what your value set really means from the shop floor through senior management, and how everyone personally interprets those."*

**Are You Leading the Way to Higher Customer Service?**

Last month's issue featured a chart showing examples of how a manager can send contradictory signals with his or her behavior when trying to bring about changes in others ("[Are You Sending Contradictory Signals?](#)"). If you're trying to increase customer service levels in your team or organization, here are a few suggestions for sending very strong and clear signals that truly walk your talk.

- Put on an apron or pick up the phone and serve customers without being introduced as a manager. You'll be sending important signals to front line staff about the importance of their jobs. And you might even learn something.
- Bring customers, customer advocates (salespeople are excellent ones), and front line service deliverers to key planning and operational sessions.
- Set and live by the ironclad rule that all promises to customers are kept. Period. Overtime and other expenses are secondary to your organization being known for keeping its word. This rule also puts pressure on everyone to be careful about the promises he or she makes.
- Serve your front line servers. Continually ask them what management can do to help them provide higher levels of customer service.

**Practical Leadership:***Inspiring Action, Achieving Results***Jim Clemmer's Leader Letter**

June 2006, Issue 39

Page 4 of 6

**Favorite May Improvement Points**

[Improvement Points](#) is a free service providing a key thought or quotation from one of my articles, provided three times per week, directly to your e-mail inbox. 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 May along with some excellent input from Chris Smith. I certainly agree with him -- especially on the term "subordinate." It is a dilemma because we also need a way of clarifying roles and who is responsible for what.

**"The single biggest source of your personal credibility with your boss is meeting your commitments. Make sure you do what you say you're going to do, and never over-promise and under-deliver."**

- from Jim Clemmer's article, "Bad Boss? Learn How to Manage Your Manager"

**Read the full article now!** [http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/bad\\_boss.shtml](http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/bad_boss.shtml)

*"Consider changing 'boss' with 'employees.' That works too! I dislike separating the two roles with 'boss' and 'employee' or 'supervisor' and 'employee,' because essentially we are all employees, albeit with different roles. Using supervisor and 'report' is OK I guess. But people tend to get the pronoun confused with the noun. I run into this dilemma a lot when discussing performance management roles. Nothing seems exactly right. I hate 'subordinate' the most."*

**- Chris Smith, Learning and Development Officer, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador**

**"In our organization consulting and leadership development work, we are often asked for the "how-to" of improving morale or motivation. But low motivation or morale are symptoms of much deeper problems."**

- from Jim Clemmer's article, "Leaders Energize and Inspire"

**Read the full article now!** [http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/leaders\\_energize.shtml](http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/leaders_energize.shtml)

**"It's very easy for entire groups to become infected with the Victimitis Virus and the Pessimism Plague. The entire group can end up moving into Pity City throwing many Pity Parties with whiny Pity Puppies scampering about barking blame in all directions."**

- from Jim Clemmer's article, "Avoiding Pity City and the Victimitis Virus"

**Read the full article now!** [http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/avoid\\_pity.shtml](http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/avoid_pity.shtml)

**Practical Leadership:***Inspiring Action, Achieving Results***Jim Clemmer's Leader Letter**

June 2006, Issue 39

Page 5 of 6

**Managing Life's "Retirement" Transition**

I first worked with Layton Fisher many years (and hairs) ago when he was doing organization development work at Esso Resources in Calgary, Alberta and I was building our training/consulting company, The Achieve Group. I was impressed by his insights and thoughtfulness on leadership, personal growth, and organizations.

If you're one of the many *Leader Letter* readers with "retirement" on the horizon in the next five to ten years, you'll find Layton's advice for growing the distance to your next life phase very useful.

*"I cringe when I use the word retirement because it really no longer fits very well, but we haven't found a good replacement word.*

*"The flywheel effect of our work lives will tend to drive us in the same direction that we have been going, unless we make some different choices. Many of us continue to do some more of what we have always done. Most of us have grown used to feeling 'productive.' In this 'productive' world we get a good bit of our self-esteem from being seen as productive. In some way, many of us become addicted to feeling productive.*

*"And then suddenly or gradually, we find ourselves in a position where our identity as an expert or a manager or a productive employee, our sense of feeling productive, our sense of feeling valued for our expertise, are all challenged.*

*"Further, our retirement planning processes have focused primarily on the financial aspects. We see many who choose to fill their lives with hobbies, or golf, or travel. All can be great components of a life. But often these are used, consciously or unconsciously, to hang on to the sense of activity and productivity that characterized our earlier life. From my experience, we need to take this retirement thing on as a conscious major transition and learning experience.*

*"Expose yourself to new things that you may have avoided in the past. Read more. Read books or magazines that you may have historically avoided. Find new ways to express your creative self. Paint, sing, or play an instrument. Explore some new areas that will help you look after yourself in case you find yourself alone. Learn to cook, or fix things around the house.*

*"Listen more. Find a few relationships with people much younger than you. You will be amazed at what we can learn from high school students. Learn to have thoughtful conversations with people who see the world differently than you do. Learn to 'sleep in and think about things.'*

*" Learn to be your own friend and to enjoy your own company. Experience spending time alone. Go to a good restaurant for dinner, alone, don't take a book. If you have a partner,*

**Practical Leadership:***Inspiring Action, Achieving Results***Jim Clemmer's Leader Letter**

June 2006, Issue 39

Page 6 of 6

*have a deeper and longer than usual conversation about this whole thing. How will your 'retirement' affect your partner, and your partner's life, and your relationship? It can be a great experience to get some support with this conversation from a coach or counselor. Have your partner think about this list and make some further suggestions. Listen well to what your partner says, then listen more deeply. Don't interrupt. Talk some more.*

*"Think about things. Stay healthy. Pass your good life on to your children, loved ones, and friends."*

**Feedback and Follow-Up**

*"I receive many e-mail newsletters and many magazine subscriptions, but yours is the only one that I consider to be mandatory reading. Thanks for sharing your insights and those of your readers."*

**- Patricia Griffin-Dobson, Director, Human Resources, Company: Canada Deposit Insurance Corporation, Ottawa, ON, Canada**

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](mailto:Jim.Clemmer@Clemmer.net).

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

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