



Practical Leadership:

Inspiring *Action*, Achieving Results

Jim Clemmer's Leader Letter

June 2007, Issue 51

Page 1 of 11

In this issue...

- **A Change for the Leader Letter**
- **Too Many Trips To The Zoo**
- **Feedback and Suggestions**
- **Building on Strengths: Coaching, Developing, and Retaining High Performers**
- **My Top Ten Articles**
- **Moving Out of a Career Rut**
- **The Birth of a Book**
- **Tell Us What You Think of Our Revised Site!**
- **Growing and Developing Others**
- **Thoughts That Make You Go Hmm...on Healthy Debates**
- **Let It Go and Come Up for Air**
- **Favorite May Improvement Points**

A Change for the *Leader Letter*

"Change is inevitable - except from a vending machine."
- Robert C. Gallagher

Welcome to the second month of the "new" *Leader Letter*. When I set about creating this new format, I wasn't sure how it would be received. But judging by the amount of new subscriptions, it looks like most folks are still finding what they need - and even more of you are passing it along to friends and colleagues. Let's see if we can keep that trend going this month!

The *Leader Letter* and my [Practical Leadership](#) blog are like coffee and cream. Each is important, but when you use them together you get something very special. Find more information about how the blog and the *Leader Letter* work together [here](#).

Too Many Trips To the Zoo

Last month I delivered a highly customized two-day [Leading @ the Speed of Change](#) workshop with a delightful Client at a ranch resort in the foothills of Alberta's beautiful Rocky mountains. This was a group of twenty-one managers and supervisors for a mid-sized family business. They were highly participative and keen to improve their personal leadership skills and move their company from very good to outstanding.

One of the key features of our workshop was a moose hunting exercise I have developed over the past seven years of work with many management teams. The Moose-on-the-Table metaphor has evolved into a very popular and effective part of my workshops and The CLEMMER Group's consulting work. There's an article explaining this at

http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/authentic_comm.shtml and a [video clip](#).

The biggest moose that emerged for this group was that they had trouble openly dealing with issues, concerns, and problems. They were just too darn nice to each other! That's certainly a good thing on the one hand. But teams (and families) that don't have courageous conversations eventually end up with bigger problems. Using a guided discussion process, we were able to effectively voice the issues and get them out on the table to form action plans.

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

June 2007, Issue 51

Page 2 of 11

This experience meshed wonderfully with a chapter I just finished the week before in my Moose-on-the-Table fable (see "[I am just making this up](#)" post for some background on this). The book's main character is Pete Leonard a struggling middle manager in a struggling company. In this short excerpt from one of the last chapters – after many trials and tribulations – Pete is talking about some of the insights and changed perspectives he's developed as he tried to deal with his own fears and the company's big moose problem:

"We've had way too much going-along-to-get-along and inauthentic conversations around here. This behavior has attracted a major herd of moose that are getting in the way and slowing us down. We need loud debates, heated conflict, and healthy arguments."

"That's the part I am having real trouble with. We have enough problems now. I don't see how more conflict is a good thing."

"Let me give you an example. Two Saturday's ago when Ryan was home from university, after a bit of overly polite discussion about what to do with our rare time together as a family, the four of us agreed to pile in our little two-door car and drive ninety minutes to the zoo. It took three hours to get back due to a huge traffic jam. I think the whole trip was mostly for old time sake. At the zoo, we spent four hours miserably trudging around from pavilion to pavilion – in the rain – looking at exhibits that we'd seen many times before and hadn't changed in ten years.

It was a quiet ride there and a sullen ride back. As we sat there stuck in traffic seven dismal hours later – and after we'd given up our Saturday together – we finally vented our true feelings. We then discovered that not one of us wanted to go to the zoo in the first place. Everybody was being too polite and going along with what they thought others wanted to do. If we would have had an open conversation with everybody stating what they really felt we could have had a much better time together."

"Yeah, our family has been there and done something like that before too," Cy chuckled as he nodded his head.

"We have been taking way too many trips to the zoo around here. In fact, we're stuffing some of the animals in our little cars and bringing them back to the office. We need to learn how to confront the brutal facts to fix the problem, not to fix the blame. We need to learn how to argue without being argumentative. We must learn how to attack all sides of the issue without attacking each other. That's a huge culture change for us."

"Yes, it is. We do avoid disagreement and differences of opinion – to each other's faces anyway."

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

June 2007, Issue 51

Page 3 of 11

Have you been part of a few too many trips to the zoo? How have you learned to skip the trip? I'd love to hear about your experiences.

Feedback and Suggestions

I am not sure if I've cut the Gordian Knot Layton refers to in his message below. I certainly continue to appreciate his ongoing support for my work. Layton is referring to our latest survey for [*Growing the Distance*](#) readers and the new [*Growing the Distance: Self-Study System*](#) I produced to go with it.

Jim

Hi Jim

I'm now in Shediac NB, my summer residence for the past 10 years or so. So I do not have my copy of "Growing the Distance" nearby -- nor does my specific memory have much data in a current file.

So my response to your survey is merely this.

I have always found your writing clear, readable, interesting and perhaps mostly practical and applicable. So 'Carry On'.

With regard to new possible products, I can only say that my view is that the greatest lack among all of us is 'Self Knowledge'.

There are lots of 'How To' resources. But 'How To' advice gets implemented through the lens of our own perceptions and values and patterns and often/mostly unconscious models and habits and assumptions of how things work. Even great ideas implemented through these unconscious levers produce uncertain and mostly unrepeatably untestable outcomes.

So any intervention that you might make into this great Gordian knotted mass could be a breakthrough. Even the consciousness of the issue might in itself make a great difference.

Great good wishes as you journey on.

Layton Fisher

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

June 2007, Issue 51

Page 4 of 11

**Building on Strengths:
Coaching, Developing, and Retaining High Performers**

The latter part of Jeff's e-mail provides an excellent example of coaching and career development. As Jeff reports, this is the kind of activity that high performing people find very valuable and increases their engagement with the coach and the organization he or she is leading.

In his third paragraph, Jeff asks for more resources around building on strengths. From my own web site library of articles I recommend browsing through [Reward and Recognition](http://www.clemmer.net/articles/subject_14.aspx) at http://www.clemmer.net/articles/subject_14.aspx and [Growing and Developing](http://www.clemmer.net/articles/subject_22.aspx) (especially the articles on growing others) at http://www.clemmer.net/articles/subject_22.aspx. If you have any other books, articles, or web sites you'd recommend, please respond with your suggestions.

While I am technically here to start the marketing department, half my goals are around shepherding the change process as the organization goes through major growth pains. The organization is fairly young. It has, and is, growing rapidly. The challenge is to grow in a sustainable way.

One of the things that doesn't look sustainable to me is the 'over-centralization' of decision making. As the company grows and management has broader responsibilities, the people doing the front line work have less decision making authority. A symptom is what I have read from your work as 'the blame game.' With so many new people and rapid growth, some mistakes are going to happen. While we need to make sure we have the right people, I am focused on trying to turn these errors from expensive problems to hold people responsible for, to at least an investment in development of those people if we actually learn from the issue.

Today, we have way more employee grievances and looking to assign blame when problems arise that we do what Ken Blanchard calls 'catching people doing things right'. I have reviewed some of my notes from your books, but could you point me in the direction of any of your particular articles in this area? Anything by other authors you would particularly recommend?

The team I lead is a technical one and the members have lots of outside opportunities for other jobs. There was major strife between a couple of team members that by stage of career and life were quite different, but actually could be quite complementary. I had the team complete Gallup's Strengths Finder profile as one way of learning about them, but more importantly taking the focus off gaps and putting it on strengths. I shared my philosophy of leadership, and that the more I could help their careers the more valuable they are here.

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

June 2007, Issue 51

Page 5 of 11

As the inevitable opportunities for great performers arise outside and if I truly have their best interest at heart, then I should help them be prepared for those. Thus, I had them go beyond the resume and had them build a portfolio that highlighted their skills and career best accomplishments. As work is only part of their lives, I asked them to share as much personal passion as they were comfortable doing. I had major resistance to this initially, but it was a powerful activity.

When it comes to 'annual goals' the development section too often turns to an offhand 'Oh, I thought I would take this class or go to that conference.' When they completed their portfolios and shared them with me, I learned a bunch about them that will help me better support them while focusing some hidden interests and abilities on meaningful work at the office. The question that really changed their perception was, 'If you went into an interview for another job (or even this one!) tomorrow, what would you like to have in this portfolio that you don't have today?'

That question led to great discussions that went way beyond a list of activities to more a sense of professional accomplishment...and more meaningful goals. I believe we are building skills to go with the talent they already have. More importantly, it has changed our relationship in that they see I am doing things for them, not just to them. While job offers still come for them from outside, I haven't lost any of them yet as I believe they have a renewed sense of what is possible and meaningful for them here. This isn't just 'touchy feel' as we have some major projects that will drive our company growth.

Regards,

Jeff

My Top Ten Articles

The single biggest driver of traffic to our web site (by a long shot) is my collection of 260 indexed [book excerpts, columns, and articles](#). I've made them freely available for you to read, [reprint](#), and pass along to others. And now you can even track which articles are most popular with my readers. The next time you go to the [articles page](#), you'll see a Top Ten Articles list. It updates dynamically, so you will always know what the hot topic is.

Moving Out of a Career Rut

What will you do if you suddenly find that smooth groove has become a deep rut? Learn to identify the symptoms and treat the problem with a few simple leadership prescriptions. [Find out more.](#)

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

June 2007, Issue 51

Page 6 of 11

The Birth of a Book

As I am working on my latest book, (a fable about Moose-on-the-Table) I reflected back to 2003 and the publication of my last book, *The Leader's Digest*. I was asked if the arrival of my fifth book (technically this is my seventh since the "new" *Firing on All Cylinders* was expanded and totally rewritten for the second edition, and we produced an extensive workbook for *The VIP Strategy: Leadership Skills for Exceptional Performance*) had become routine and less exciting. Like first love or a first child, a first book is charged with novelty and high excitement. But like the arrival of any child, each one is special. The fifth (or seventh) is no less a welcome addition to a growing family.

When we sent out the announcement about *The Leader's Digest* in February of 2003, I said that after months of hard labor it was a bit like giving birth. One woman gave me feedback objecting to a man making that comparison. Point taken. Obviously I have never personally gone through giving birth. I talked this feedback over with my wife, Heather, who has been deeply involved with the conception, labor, and delivery of all my books. *The Leader's Digest* was especially challenging for us because we ran into a big wall of new problems getting permission to use material from other sources. In all my past books, we never encountered any problems. This is one of the reasons I am enjoying the freedom of writing my current book as a work of fiction. I can just make stuff up!

In the past few years, the publishing industry has changed and publishers have put huge restrictions on use of their material as well as charging, in some cases, astronomical fees. So we had to make numerous changes and revisions that we'd never had to make before (with both the "new" *Firing on All Cylinders* and the "new" *Pathways to Performance* I used many times more material from other publishers with not one permission problem). After going through many weeks of huge amounts of extra work and major pain, Heather declared that giving birth to our three kids was easier!

Now that the "new" version of *The Leader's Digest* has been out for a few years, it's gratifying to have over 30,000 copies in print and demand rising over the last year. We have a number of Clients like Barrick Gold who are using it as a text for their worldwide training of thousands of their managers (a program we designed for them).

Tell Us What You Think of Our Revised Site!

Eagle-eyed visitors to the site have probably noticed that we've made some changes. If you haven't been by in a while, pay us a visit! Some of the new features include:

- "News & Events" column on the home page
- Top Ten Articles list
- Embedded videos
- Improved navigation

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

June 2007, Issue 51

Page 7 of 11

Now it's your turn to let us know how we're doing (and maybe suggest some ways we could do things better).

We've created a short survey, so please take a few minutes to give us your feedback. We plan to keep the survey open until the end of June, and post the results online and in the July issue of the *Leader Letter*.

[Click here to take survey.](#)

Growing and Developing Others

One of the amazing things about the internet is the reach it allows. Here is an exchange I had from Kishore in India.

Jim,

I have read most of your books and passed on your books to my friends. I have been following your writings for more than 6 years now.

I am currently writing a blog on Leadership (<http://blogs.siliconindia.com/leadersworld>). I wrote one post about you with title "Leadership insights from Jim Clemmer".

I am also glad to see you start a blog. We can understand your views better now. Newsletter is mostly tailored whereas blog is much more free flowing in conveying your thoughts. I am able to read your posts as soon as they are posted.

I wanted to understand one challenge leaders face.

How can you find and train a person to fill in your shoes? Being a successful leader is one challenge but leaving a legacy that can be continued by someone else is important. How can one recruit and mentor a person to fill our shoes. I believe succession planning is a key responsibility for leaders and any tips regarding this will be appreciated.

Hope to hear from you on this.

Regards

Kishore

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

June 2007, Issue 51

Page 8 of 11

What Kishore described is a very key responsibility of leaders. Growing and developing others is absolutely central to leadership. You can find a selection of my writing on both personal growth and growing others at http://www.clemmer.net/articles/subject_22.aspx.

You can also find a few references to coaching in my [February 2004 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/articles/article_159.aspx.

Thoughts That Make You Go Hmm...on Healthy Debates

"Honest disagreement is often a good sign of progress."

- Ghandi

"I argue very well. Ask any of my remaining friends. I can win an argument on any topic, against any opponent. People know this, and steer clear of me at parties. Often, as a sign of their great respect, they don't even invite me."

- Dave Barry, American humorist, author, journalist

"Couples who never argue are 35 per cent more likely to divorce, On the surface, that seems like a strange finding, since we associate arguments with bad outcomes, but an inability to share frustration is a dangerous thing. If you don't argue, [frustrations] build up within you until they get bigger and bigger."

- David Niven, psychologist, Florida Atlantic University and author of *The 100 Simple Secrets of Relationships*

"Many times, often with the best of intentions, people at work decide it's more productive to remain silent about their differences than to air them. But as new research....shows, silencing doesn't smooth things over or make people more productive. It merely pushes differences beneath the surface and can set in motion powerfully destructive forces."

- Leslie Perlow and Stephanie Williams, "Is Silence Killing Your Company?" *Harvard Business Review*

"No tree becomes rooted and sturdy unless many a wind assails it. For by its very tossing it tightens its grip and plants its roots more securely; the fragile trees are those that have grown in a sunny valley."

- Seneca the Younger



Practical Leadership:

Inspiring Action, Achieving Results

Jim Clemmer's Leader Letter

June 2007, Issue 51

Page 9 of 11

"I sat at a table where were rich food and wine in abundance, and obsequious attendance, but sincerity and truth were not; and I went away hungry from the inhospitable board."

- Walden

Let It Go and Come Up for Air

I love to get comments like this one from Sharon, a subscriber responding to a recent Improvement Point she received. Whether it's in a workshop or an e-mail, comments like hers so wonderfully bring alive the point I'm trying to get across.

For those of you who don't know, [*Improvement Points*](#) is a free subscription service that sends out short excerpts from one of my articles or books three times per week.

Here's the original Improvement Point:

"For our own health and happiness, we must exercise our choice to let go. No matter how long we nurse a grudge, it won't get better. When we bury the hatchet, we need to make sure we don't keep a shovel handy. Life is too short -- and likely to get even shorter -- if like vultures, we feed on dead issues."

- from Jim Clemmer's article, "Choosing Our Poison or Choosing to Let Go"

[Read the full article now](#)

Good Morning Jim,

I just wanted to say your article on 'Choosing Our Poison or Choosing to Let Go.' In my organization it is very evident there is mistrust and holding of grudges between the business and IT folks that support them. Even though there have been organizational changes and restructure of processes, so many 'long timers' can not let go of past history. During meetings of the minds I often start out by saying; 'Let's forget the past, we will focus on today's issue at hand to determine the best approach to correct the problem and move forward. Together we will learn from this mistake without pointing fingers and document for next time.' Most often this works, but there are some that need more time to change...

*Sharon Amorth
Regina, Saskatchewan*

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

June 2007, Issue 51

Page 10 of 11

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 brief 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:

"Improvement planning, process management, teams, skill development, and the like are either constrained or boosted by our organization's structure and support systems. If they are poorly aligned with our Context and Focus (vision, values, and purpose), strategies, and goals, performance will never come close to its full potential."

- from Jim Clemmer's article, "Organization Structure Limits or Liberates High Performance"

[Read the full article now!](#)

http://www.clemmer.net/articles/article_156.aspx

"No matter how "right" a vision, deeply held principles, or purpose may be, they won't mobilize others if they can't be effectively communicated."

- from Jim Clemmer's article, "Strong Leaders are Strong Communicators"

[Read the full article now!](#)

http://www.clemmer.net/articles/article_37.aspx

"At my youngest daughter's sixth birthday party, a five-year-old boy hit her on the head. Asked to apologize, he politely refused: "Mr. Clemmer, I don't apologize unless I see teeth marks or blood."

Many managers don't realize the problems they're creating unless they see the teeth marks or blood on those with whom they work. The most insensitive managers are those who lack good feedback systems and refuse to seek input on how to improve their own performance."

- from Jim Clemmer's article, "Don't Wait to See Blood"

[Read the full article now!](#)

http://www.clemmer.net/articles/article_331.aspx



JIM CLEMMER

Practical Leadership:

Inspiring Action, Achieving Results

Jim Clemmer's Leader Letter

June 2007, Issue 51

Page 11 of 11

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!

Jim

Please post or forward this newsletter to colleagues, Clients, or associates you think might be interested.

If you received this newsletter from someone else, and would like to subscribe, click here:

www.clemmer.net/subscribe.shtml

Copyright 2007, Jim Clemmer, The CLEMMER Group