



Practical Leadership:

Inspiring *Action*, Achieving Results

Jim Clemmer's Leader Letter

March 2005, Issue 24

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Discussing...Courage is at the Core of Leadership

Last month I led off the *Leader Letter* with some of my thoughts on courage that have been taking shape around the latest book I have started to put together (<http://www.clemmer.net/news/feb2005.html#courage>). I asked for readers' thoughts on this topic. Wow! Did I get a great response! The quantity and quality of feedback underscored just how central courage is to leadership. Here is a sample of the very thoughtful responses I received. Where reader responses were fully named, this was with the permission of the writers.

Hi Jim,

I work in health care and find that I often encounter situations that offend my sense of ethics. I've observed that many people choose to do nothing about these sorts of situations. But the approach I've taken is to look at what my professional and organizational responsibilities are in the situation. Can I ignore the issue without failing in my responsibilities to my employer and myself? If I can't then I have to speak up, even if I'm scared to or it may hurt me personally. In a former position this entailed speaking up about abuse from the CEO, which other people had been accepting for years. I did speak up, after a few very stressful months I got fired for it and the person in power continued to abuse - primarily because people who had the responsibility to evaluate her didn't have the courage to act appropriately. So, nothing changed except that I had taken a stand about what I would accept from an employer - a decision I've never regretted.

Several years later the CEO was fired for exactly the same kind of behavior. So eventually something did happen. But, if others had come forward when I did, she would have been gone years before and a great deal of damage to the organization would never have occurred. However, one person can only do so much. I did what I could and moved on to a much better position in an organization I love. So, ironically, speaking up actually benefited me both personally and professionally. The whole process also taught me a lot about how I never want to treat people! Funny how that works sometimes. Really enjoy your newsletter.

"Claudia"

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Mr. Clemmer,

First of all, let me say how much I enjoy your e-mailed newsletters and articles. I love to read your stuff... and have quoted you on several occasions (always with proper credit given, of course). The most recent example was when I was in a sister location, presenting to their leadership the concept of continuous improvement through a proactive Quality Management System and I quoted from "Don't Wait to See the Blood." To read this article go to http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/see_blood.shtml. They liked the quote so much that they wanted to make a banner that reads "Don't wait to see the blood..." and put it up in their customer service area to remind them of the need for proactive customer service.

When reading your newsletter about the venture of writing regarding courage... I would give you the following "pearls of wisdom" from my own experiences:

- Gathering information when making decisions can increase your courage to act ("act on fact"). However, too much analysis can leave you second guessing your gut, and paralyze you.*
- Embrace and stay connected to something larger than you. Courage to act is often more likely when you are founded upon a rock that is larger than yourself (such as core beliefs, religion, community, family, or other entity). By having that source of order and strength to draw from during your "trial," you can be confident and courageous that even if you fail, you are still sustained by something beyond yourself. Yes, leadership is lonely. But sometimes we make it much lonelier than it has to be.*
- Don't let past poor judgment paralyze you. It is easy to feel that since you failed once (or twice, etc)... that you are now a failure. If you subscribe to that, you'll let that self-doubt paralyze you. Instead, realize that because you have failed... you are now smarter. You now have MORE experience than before, and so are MORE qualified to make the next decision... rather than less.*

Hope that helps... keep up the good work.

**Bryan Mayhann, Quality Manager, Harte-Hanks
Boston, MA**

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Hi Jim,

I can't wait until you complete your new book! There is a great need for a book that addresses courage. Through out my life I have found that not stepping up and sharing my beliefs or challenging the status quo were the times I suffered the most. When fear held me hostage I felt more pain from not living up to my standards than I ever did by standing up for my convictions. Time and again I have witnessed good people who let their fear of what might happen if they stand up for what they believe keep them bound, silent, and miserable. Fear makes slaves, courage enables freedom. Many leaders fear that stating their views is a career limiting move. In truth it appears that not providing the sometimes tough message to their boss is what really limits their career because they cannot succeed if they are leading against their principles. They will be incongruent, insincere, and cannot lead their team as they must to be truly successful.

Well, I'll get off my soapbox. It is a topic dear to me. I have seen potentially excellent leaders limit their success on either completely tuning in to politics and not doing anything that they feel is not beneficial to their career or shooting from the hip without regard for politics. In order to be a truly successful leader both types must moderate their behavior.

Thanks,

Diane Cappel
Freeport, TX

Jim,

I read your article on courage with great interest. My 28 year old son and I often have conversations about "stepping out of our comfort zones." We're stepping but it isn't always easy. Last year, he gave me a small pewter angel which I keep on my desk. Inscribed on "my girl" is a quote from Eleanor Roosevelt, "You must do the things you think you cannot do." Often, before I make a presentation in front of a large group of people, I take a deep breath and repeat those words.

Kathleen Price, Employee Relations, Wyeth Pharmaceuticals

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Jim,

Not a life altering experience to offer you but just a thought and a quotation I like. By the way I enjoyed your bullet points on fear and courage.

I have gone into many meetings, conversations, situations with some fear and trepidation only to come out with the highest feeling of accomplishment. To face your fears without compromising your values is one of life's most rewarding experiences. The quote:

"One of the saddest experiences that can come to a human being is to awaken, grey haired and wrinkled, near the close of an unproductive career to the fact that all through the years he (she) has been using only a small part of himself."

– V.W. Burrows

How many of us do not set goals out of fear of failure, do not take risk out of fear of failure, do not cross the road or the room to introduce ourselves out of fear of rejection. Easy lives are shallow lives....get out there and live!! Great topic, thanks for the opportunity to express my thoughts.

Ken Chisholm, Corporate Sales and Marketing Manager, Great Western Containers

Dear Jim,

Thank you for your writing about courage - I believe that courage may be the biggest stumbling block to achieving our personal and professional goals.

Having enough courage to take the first step or first fall is the hardest part.

The first part of that is self talk - if we talk to ourselves negatively than we already are in trouble. Someone said: think of the positive ending you want to see and work step by step for it. I will try to do something thinking in that way (seeing the positive end) and I am surprised at some of the different decisions I make by thinking that way.

For example with my teenage children – I start with what do I want them to learn from this situation in the end and I work from there. Or when I take a class - what do I want for an outcome of the class - it may be an A or it may be to keep my sanity and not sacrifice myself, my family or friends, and be OK with a lesser mark.

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In work situations if I am afraid of doing something - for example talking to an employee about his or her attitude - I have found that the first step is the hardest - easier sometimes to ignore or walk away or excuse away - but to start the conversation is the hardest part and that takes courage.

I believe part of courage is that it is OK to make a mistake and learn from it - sometimes we are held back by our fear of making a mistake. If a child learning to walk is held back because of fear of failing (or falling) than s/he would never learn to walk - it is the repeated failure that helps him/her learn to walk. Do you think that taking that first step is often the hardest?

Thank you Jim for your letters - I sure enjoy reading them.

Karen Eisler
Regina, SK

Bridging the Credibility Gap

Credibility, trust, and integrity are becoming ever larger issues with management teams at all organizational levels. People are looking for more from their leaders. As they fail to get the leadership they crave, a large credibility gap is opening up. In many cases, it's becoming a chasm. For example, nearly **50 percent** of people don't believe the information they receive from senior management!

In February, I published a new article in *The Globe & Mail* entitled "Bridging the Credibility Gap." To read this article go to <http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/credibility.shtml>. Following are e-mail messages I received in response to the article. I'd like to hear from you on this major leadership problem. Please e-mail your views, experiences, or advice to me at Jim.Clemmer@Clemmer.net.

Great article in The Globe & Mail. I applaud your clarity and common sense wisdom. About 1985 [I retired in 1995 from Imperial Oil, the Canadian affiliate of Exxon] I began to do most of my work as a coach to senior managers and leaders in Imperial, both individually and in teams. That was before coaching was a big word, and it allowed me to intervene in personal development issues, but in the context of the business.

That's also the basis of all the work I have done since leaving Imperial. The coaching issues are very important. But they appear to be treated in the popular press as though they are trainable skills - rather than personal growth/development/counseling/therapy kind of issues, which I think they are.

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Nothing is ever black or white but personal coaching is a context in which senior folks get to meet themselves in a safe place, and have no one to impress, so the possibility of authenticity and self-awareness increases. I worry that coaching has become another buzzword that taints the possibility of what a coach can be for a leader. So many folks who call themselves coaches are in their own early stages of development, and that can get in the way.

All this is in support of your point about the importance of the leader's behavior as a big human being who knows what that means and works with his or her colleagues from that place.

Keep up the good work Jim – I look forward to your next column.

Layton Fisher
Calgary, AB

I just read your article in The Globe & Mail and it's right on. Having completed some graduate work with the focus on the people side of change, I have a renewed interest in developing the basic skills of dialogue with senior managers as defined by Senge and Isaac. Reading your article reinforces that view and really it is so simple but the skills are elusive. We debate and defend very well -- rarely try to explore for understanding and place our own assumptions on the table for review.

My recent work experiences with program evaluation and managing processes reinforces the fact that lack of trust can become a significant barrier to achieving desired results. It is interesting to explore what is really a system problem and what is a people problem.

I do wonder how much you can really influence someone's behavior using what you are suggesting if their natural tendency is the command and control orientation perhaps driven by a genuine distrust of others.

It seems to me that the critical success factor is really the managers and their relationship with the people they manage. It would be difficult for those who believe in the more autocratic approach to be able to enter into the type of open setting you are promoting.

Just wondering...

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I agree with you. Autocrats have a very tough time moving to the open approach I have spent 30 years of my life using and promoting. That is why study after study shows that the teams/organizations autocrats lead are much less effective. It's why I filled *The Leader's Digest* with research proving the power of participative leadership. This starts with Chapter One's distinctions between process/system versus people issues (available for reading online at http://www.clemmer.net/books/tld_ch1.shtml). Chapter Five (Passion and Commitment) has even more research on the dramatically higher results of participative leadership versus autocratic management.

I really enjoyed your article in today's Globe. I completely agree with what you say about the importance of employees trusting their managers. Nevertheless, I have a question about your mention of coaching in the "Not Serving the Servers" section.

I'm not sure what you mean about coaching not attacking the credibility problem. I would have thought that most employers who introduce coaching do so because of their sincere desire to improve the organization.

Secondly, I feel the word "discipline" has two connotations: negatively, as in punishment, and positively, as in learning by repetition. I assume in the article you intended the negative concept. I feel that a positive coaching approach could very well include a positive form of discipline that encourages the repetition of attempts at new behaviors, no matter how halting those attempts might be.

Would you mind clarifying this point?

I should have put "coaching" in quotation marks. What I was trying to say here is that many managers discipline or punish people and call it coaching. In The CLEMMER Group's consulting work we're finding that in a growing number of organizations, having a "coaching session" means being corrected or reprimanded. Truly effective coaching helps good performers step up to their next level of effectiveness. Correcting performance problems shouldn't be called coaching. While sometimes needed, it's a step or two before coaching on the performance management continuum.

The even bigger point I was making with this section, is that service problems are rarely an individual performance issue. In 85 – 90% of cases, the service delivered by the front line reflects the processes, systems, structure, or culture of the organization. Front line servers are victims of the organization who just pass along the poor service they get to the customer they are serving.

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Answering our Call to Adventure in Searching for Purpose and Meaning

A web site visitor read my article, "Purpose Gives Us a Deep Sense of Meaning" (http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/purpose_gives.shtml) and sent me the following e-mail. Perhaps it was part of his "call to adventure" that created the "coincidence" of him stumbling across this article...

Dear Mr. Clemmer,

What if you don't know your purpose? What if you haven't found a sense of meaning? How do you apply something you have not yet gained to carry momentum forward in creating action and strength of meaning?

I wish someone could tell me how I can gain this which seems missing from my life. What is my purpose? That may be too deep to understand. What gives me meaning or the things I do...now or in the future? Why does this question bring no answer?

It's not that I lack feelings. If anything, I have probably been far too responsive to emotions through out my life. So what does one do when they have options but no sense of meaning?

Here's my response:

Your dilemma is widely shared. If there is any comfort in knowing you're not alone, you certainly are not.

The search for meaning is as old as humankind itself. At the societal level, every culture has searched for meaning through religion, mythology, and related pursuits. This clearly comes from deep personal yearnings we all have to find meaning and purpose in our lives. I believe the constant and continuous search is a key part of the journey. It's not so much in the finding as in the searching. Once we have stopped searching and think we have found the answer, it slips from our grasp. So we have to keep searching.

Lately I have been studying ancient mythology and modern storytelling such as in movies, books, and television. Based on his extensive research for his book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell would say that your asking of these questions is your "call to adventure." Your adventure is the personal and unique search for meaning and purpose in your life. Only you can take this journey. I would encourage you to accept the call and push forward in your quest. It's very hard to tell you which path you should take since we all have to find our own way.

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At the risk of appearing too self-serving, I could point you toward my book *Growing the Distance: Timeless Principles for Personal and Career Success* and its *Personal Implementation Guide*. This book is my attempt to synthesize and condense the key principles that ultimately answer the three key questions of our lives; Where am I trying to go (picturing my Preferred Future)? What do I believe in? Why do I exist? The 100 page workbook contains a series of self-assessments, application exercises, and menus with hundreds of how-to suggestions to try. Check them out at <http://www.clemmer.net/books.shtml>.

I think a key part of the quest is to examine our mental frameworks and how we deal with adversity and challenges in our life. You can see a Navigator-Survivor-Victim model that's proven to be very useful for this from the March 2004 issue of the *Leader Letter* at <http://www.clemmer.net/news/mar2004.html>. The April issue continues a follow up discussion from some readers sparked by this chart. Another important leg of the trip is really knowing our strengths and aligning our lives around our core strengths.

Your questions bring no answers because there aren't any. There are only more questions. Courageously embarking on our own "hero's journey" in search of answers will take us further down the path of happiness and fulfillment. I hope this has given you some encouragement and help. Bon Voyage!

Jim

I'd love to get your experiences on answering your own call to adventure in searching for purpose and meaning in your life. E-mail me at Jim.Clemmer@Clemmer.net.

Even More on...Leading Spirited Teams

In the January 2005 issue of the *Leader Letter* I provided a link to my *Globe & Mail* article published that month entitled "Team Spirit Built from the Top" (http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/team_spirit.shtml). In a wonderful bit of synchronicity, at the very time I was writing the next *Globe & Mail* article on management's large credibility gap (see "[Bridging the Credibility Gap](#)" elsewhere in this issue), Mark Brown's e-mail popped into my inbox challenging what I had written in the previous article. His comments provided a perspective very consistent with the new article I was working on. Go to <http://www.clemmer.net/news/feb2005.html#teams> to read Mark's e-mail from the February issue of the *Leader Letter*. Below is a response to Mark's e-mail from another *Leader Letter* reader (reprinted with Chris' permission).

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Re: Mark Brown's response

Only too often do we hear this song where we promote a high performer into a position of responsibility and therefore set someone up for failure. Indeed I may have drawn this same line myself from time to time.

However I can also think of many "good" leaders or managers that have come from the "trenches." It ultimately comes down to what constitutes a high performing cashier. If some of those traits include positive attitude, team player, involved or accountable then in fact the high performing cashier may be a logical choice to promote. If the criterion is no more than how many receipts one can process in a given day then again they may not be a logical choice. I would be wary of not looking at your better performers when opportunities exist. Just make sure it is the traits that you find important for the role and your culture.

That being said, where we often fail is when someone promoted doesn't receive proper coaching or mentoring and only too often are they left out to hang. Then the assumption may take place that a high performing cashier should never have been a manager.

**Chris Moote, BC Instruments, Lean Manufacturing Coordinator
Schomberg, ON**

Fixing Performance Review Systems: Most are a Disaster

Hi Jim,

We are currently using your Leader's Digest and its Practical Application Planner to work through the concepts with the supervisors in our organization. We are a non-profit seniors home registered with the Societies Act. The performance review (evaluation) forms available are very antiquated. Do you have any such guideline/format that would assist me in completing their reviews that would help me emphasize what we are learning during our transition from "supervisor" type roles to more enabling type roles that I don't have new terminology for yet.

Any advice would be appreciated.

**Carol Anderson, Consulting CEO, Good Shepherd Lutheran Social Service Society
Wetaskiwin, AB**



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Hi Carol,

Thanks for your question. It is an important one. Most performance review systems are a disaster. They're a perfect example of a great idea – getting team leader and team member together periodically to review what's work and what's not and make plans for continuous improvement – that have become a bureaucratic "fill in the forms" exercise. They are demotivating and degrading in most organizations and would be better to be dropped altogether.

Moving to a more enabling role is all about coaching. I'd suggest you use "The Coach's Playbook" on page 58 of *The Leader's Digest: Practical Application Planner* as your guideline or format. Pages 160 – 172 of *The Leader's Digest* outline more fully what you see in "The Coach's Playbook."

I hope that's helpful!

Jim

Dear Jim,

Thanks so very much for your response to my question. Why is it sometimes so easy to overlook the most obvious?! This fits excellently with our organizational philosophy and model. Most importantly it also makes the application of the material from your books (that we are working on learning) more realistic and practical.

Our organization has implemented a relational model of governance that focuses on relationship. You may or may not be aware of this work:

Stalke, Les with Loughlin, Jennifer. (2003). "Governance Matters: Relational Model of Governance, Leadership and Management". Imperial Printing Ltd., Edmonton: AB. Their Internet site is www.GovernanceMatters.Com.

This model and your works are very complementary and I thoroughly am enjoying integrating and implementing them in our organization.

Again thank you very much for your guidance AND for your very practical tools for us to work from.



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Top Improvement Points from February

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:

"Too many managers believe that their place on the organization chart gives them power. They are in control. They are the boss. Their attitude seems to be 'I am really easy to get along with once you learn to do as I say.'"

- from [Might is No Longer Right](http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/might_no.shtml)
www.clemmer.net/excerpts/might_no.shtml

"When performance problems arise, they need to be confronted. Like porcupines in love, such discussions are painful for both parties. That's often why managers avoid them. Leaders, however, know that poor performance is like a highly contagious disease. The longer it goes unchecked, the more everyone suffers."

- from [Leaders Handle Performance Problems](http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/leaders_handle.shtml)
www.clemmer.net/excerpts/leaders_handle.shtml

"Our values are most truly revealed when times are toughest. When the heat is on and the pressure is building, what do we care most about?"

- from [Being True to Me](http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/being_true.shtml)
www.clemmer.net/excerpts/being_true.shtml

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

Thoughts That Make You Go Hmmmm...on Management Values and Credibility

"We ought not to treat living creatures like shoes or household belongings, which when worn with use we throw away."

- Plutarch, Greek moralist and philosopher

"In the extreme, dissonant leaders can range from the abusive tyrant, who bawls out and humiliates people, to the manipulative sociopath. Such leaders have an emotional impact a bit like the 'dementors' in the Harry Potter series, who 'drain peace, hope and happiness out of the air around them.' They create wretched workplaces, but have no idea how destructive they are - or they simply don't care."

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

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"The majority of employees are not engaged at work. More than forty-two independent Gallup studies indicate that approximately 75 percent of employees in most companies are not engaged at work.

"Disengaged employees cost companies hundreds of millions of dollars annually. Employees who are disengaged from their current roles cost companies fortunes in lost revenue, higher turnover, lost workdays, and lower productivity."

- Curt Coffman and Gabriel Gonzalez-Molina, Follow This Path: How the World's Greatest Organizations Drive Growth by Unleashing Human Potential

Link into my Travel Plans and Reduce Travel Costs to Book Me

We have a large base of subscribers and Clients in Western Canada who often want to know when I'll be in that region so they can hire me and split travel costs. I have a keynote presentation the morning of May 3 in Vancouver and I am available to be booked on May 4 or 5 in Western Canada.

I am also back in Vancouver during the last week of June and could be available for engagements in Western Canada on June 28 or 29.

Contact Heather at heather@clemmer.net or (519) 748-6561 to explore these dates and potential work I might do with your organization, association, or group.

Public Workshops—Leadership, Change, and Personal Growth**Leading @ the Speed of Change**

Are you feeling overwhelmed and overworked? Do you need practical approaches to leading yourself and others through all the craziness in today's world?

Leadership is even more critical to our personal, team, and organization success in today's fast changing environment.

That's why you won't want to miss this rare opportunity (I only do a few open or public workshops per year) to spend two powerful days together on this crucial success factor.

Join me right here in my hometown, Kitchener, Ontario, for two intensive days at my **Leading @ the Speed of Change** workshop. Check it out at www.clemmer.net/events/lsc/lsc.shtml.

Kitchener, ON - May 31 - June 1, 2005



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My Evolving Approach to Writing the *Leader Letter*

A fellow member of the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers sent me an e-mail to say that she's been a loyal reader of the *Leader Letter* and is starting her own e-newsletter. She asked me for advice. Following is my response. I published it here so you – loyal reader – can get a flavor for my thinking and approach to producing the *Leader Letter* each month (although this issue makes a mockery of the short part!). And I sure do hope this e-newsletter is worth much more than you're paying for it!

I believe making it practical is critical. As you know from the *Leader Letter*, I serve up a smorgasbord of items that build upon and draw from my work. I run book excerpts, sections from my workbooks, favorite quotes, experiences, new articles, promotions for new offerings, etc. Lately, I have been getting lots of e-mails and feedback that have made up much of the content. I think this provides variety to readers and pushes me to go deeper into areas I may not have written too much about or looked at in quite that way.

I would suggest you keep the newsletter short (I keep trying to shrink mine down, but don't always succeed), chatty (informal), and a reflection of what you do and your style.

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

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

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