



Practical Leadership:
Inspiring Action, Achieving Results

Jim Clemmer's Leader Letter

May 2006, Issue 38

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Are You Sending Contradictory Signals?

Recently I was asked to further explain and illustrate an exercise in *Growing the Distance: Personal Implementation Guide* ("Being the Change I Want to See in Others" on page 39). As you review this assessment, pick the two or three top changes you're trying to make in your team or organization. Review the points in the "Examples of Contradictory Signals" column. Does this sound all too familiar? What are you going to do to improve?

Even better, get your management team involved in assessing and discussing your individual and collective leadership examples on the big changes or initiatives you're trying to implement. Now what about the people you're leading? Do you have, or could you get, their perceptions on whether you are leading by example?

The Change I Want to See in Others	Examples of Contradictory Signals
Higher customer service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Exhorting or pushing front line staff to provide higher customer service rather than digging deep to learn how to serve them so they can better serve customers. ➤ What information, training, systems, processes, or other improvements do they need to provide better service? ➤ Do front line staff feel that you even care about their needs?
More teamwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Gossiping, putting down, or not supporting your peers or other departments. ➤ Openly discussing disagreements with your peers or more senior management with people in your organization. ➤ Guarding turf and building walls around your own part of the organization.
Continuous improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Slipping behind with your own personal growth and development because you're too busy. ➤ Continuing to use the same leadership approaches or management tools because you're comfortable with them. ➤ Not continuously building your skills.



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Clearer priority setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Being used by today's 24/7 technology rather than using these technical tools to fit your goals, approaches, and priorities. ➤ Always being available. Letting short-term urgencies continually crowd out longer term strategies and team or organization development. ➤ Failing to search out and destroy activities that are no longer needed.
Increased health and safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Not living a healthy and safe lifestyle at work and at home. ➤ Failing to understand how health and safety issues most often result from poor leadership, ineffective processes, and a low performance culture. ➤ Treating safety violations as one-off special causes rather than seeing the deeper pattern of common causes rooted in organizational practices.
Greater accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Failing to relentlessly follow-through and follow-up. ➤ Spending more time launching new plans or projects than reviewing how your current ones are doing. ➤ Daily operational crises overshadow regular progress checks and the resetting of your plans and priorities.
Higher morale/motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Not showing visible passion and a deep commitment to your own work. ➤ Failing to actively ask, survey, and diagnose what's turning people off and then engaging them in joint problem solving around those issues. ➤ Discounting opinions of internal people as "just their perception, not reality."
Take responsibility/ownership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Weak upward and outward leadership. ➤ Pointing fingers upward at more senior management or blaming others for your own or your organization's problems. ➤ Easily giving up or becoming cynical about seemingly intractable organizational, market, political, or other external factors.
Higher commitment/engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Not involving people in your organization in open discussions and shared problem solving. ➤ Plenty of micromanagement and "snoopervising." Little delegation and development of team members. ➤ Not openly sharing goals, successes, and failures. ➤ Management perks and privileges like reserved parking accentuating organizational hierarchy.
More innovation/creativity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Not constantly trying new approaches, learning, and changing. ➤ Discounting ideas or "happy accidents" that aren't in the plan or don't come from the "right people." ➤ Very little personal experimentation. ➤ Failing to encourage and learn from good tries that don't quite hit the mark the first time.



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Thoughts That Make You Go Hmmm...on Leading by Example

"The most effective communication is face to face. The most believable communication is behavior."

Author unknown

"From this body of research, we discovered that emotional intelligence is carried through an organization like electricity through wires. To be more specific, the leader's mood is quite literally contagious, spreading quickly and inexorably throughout the business."

Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, and Annie McKee, Emotional Intelligence researchers and authors

"As they emulate our behavior, they show us ourselves in a clearer way."

James Redfield, *The Celestine Vision: Living the New Spiritual Awareness*

"Customers who are ill-treated by a poorly trained associate, or employees working side by side with someone clearly incompetent, surmise that the business doesn't respect them. And their anger spreads outward: from the unacceptable employee to the manager who hired him, to the person who trained him, to the manager who hired the trainer, and so on."

Leigh Buchanan, "Sweat the Small Stuff," *Harvard Business Review*

Another Case of Bolt-On Change Programs versus Built-In Processes

60 - 70 percent of initiatives to introduce new organizational direction, change the culture, improve customer service or quality levels, maximize investments in technology, and the like either fail outright or fall way short of their original goals. Whenever I am facilitating a management team retreat, efforts that are destined to head down the road to failure have telltale signs showing up fairly clearly during or shortly after the session.

Last year I facilitated a retreat with a senior management team that included lots of bold declarations by the CEO and other key leaders. During the session we did a "moose hunting exercise" (see the October 2004 issue at www.clemmer.net/news/oct2004.html) to identify and plan for ways to address critical organization issues. The biggest moose included problems with decision making, role clarity, openness and true dialogue, as well as trust and micromanagement.

The three core leaders of this team promised to address the issues. But their focus continued to be on strategy and budgets. They seemed to understand intellectually that these "soft" issues were critical to getting "hard" results. Management is about getting compliance with a plan. Leadership is about building excitement and strong commitment.

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These leaders failed to truly understand their approach to dealing with these issues set the model for how the extended management team and entire organization deals with difficult feedback and looks in the mirror to address effectiveness.

Six months later, the change effort had narrowed substantially to a focus on budgets and operations. The three core leaders fell into the all too common trap of using their own perceptions about whether these issues are being effectively dealt with. They did not show leadership, by finding non-threatening/intimidating ways to get authentic input from the full management team about whether things were getting better in these areas. They even cancelled the often repeated pledge at the retreat to get together again in six months for a progress check on these issues and the strategic plan.

It's an all too common story. What are your experiences with how to avoid this problem in your management team? Please e-mail me at Jim.Clemmer@Clemmer.net.

The Practical How-To's of Leadership

Leadership is clearly THE key to success. That's why it's such a popular topic. But despite all the talk about leadership and change, many "change fatigued" people are still struggling with just *how* to strengthen their personal effectiveness and leadership. Many supervisors, managers, and executives are confused by the multitude of leadership grids, charts, formulas, jargon, fads, charismatic stories, and buzzwords. Front line staff often end up with a sense of "there they go again on another tangent." Or "they are doing it to us again."

There are no instant answers, quick and easy steps, or guaranteed approaches. What's more important than what's new in the leadership field, is *applying* what works. That's why I am constantly distilling my decades of research, thirty years of experience, and collection of best practices into easily understood, highly energizing, and *practical* applications. My *Leading @ the Speed of Change* Workshop continues to be very popular because it inspires action and provides 'how to' steps that - when used as directed - can dramatically boost results.

Please join me for my only public workshop in 2006 (my sessions are usually customized in-house workshops), right here in my hometown, Kitchener, Ontario, on May 30 and May 31. Check out the session or download a PDF workshop brochure at www.clemmer.net/events/lsc/lsc.shtml. There are special discounts for bringing colleagues along so you can learn and apply these principles together.

If you can't make this session but would like to explore bringing a customized version into your organization, send me an e-mail at Jim.Clemmer@Clemmer.net.

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Sorting Through Top Priority Projects and Goals

Recently a *Leader Letter* subscriber asked for turnaround advice on moving into a new role in an organization loaded with problems. He was shown a consultant's report with forty-five recommendations for improvement. Many would be major projects taking years to complete. And all recommendations were considered urgent. He asked which of the more than 300 of my articles on our web site would help him sort all this out.

What he was asking about is a common problem I run into with management teams when I am facilitating planning retreats. Far too many organizations have along list of top priority projects and goals.

One of my articles that I referred him to is at www.clemmer.net/excerpts/pp_orggoals.shtml. There are also many of my approaches and perspectives on this common challenge in the June 2005 issue of the *Leader Letter* at www.clemmer.net/news/june2005.html. Under the section "Steps to a Goal Deployment System" is an outline of the approach I suggested he use. A key tool for distilling a long list of projects/priorities is clustering or the Affinity Diagram. That approach always narrows the list down to a handful of clusters that can then be more effectively managed.

I have facilitated over 200 off-site management team retreats using variations of these approaches. If you'd like a document outlining my process/approach and options in hiring me as a facilitator, drop me an e-mail at Jim.Clemmer@Clemmer.net and I'll send it to you.

Sins of Omission and Managers Taking Credit or Blaming Others

"I have been reading your book, [The Leader's Digest](#) and two questions came to mind:

- 1. It appears you endorse 'sin of commission, not sin of omission.' Do you believe this is the philosophy of a leader?*
- 2. What can a leader do to help those middle managers you speak about understand that they need not take all the credit personally when things go well, just as they need not blame 'the team' when things are not well-received by the client?"*

If by your first question you mean that I endorse overlooking mistakes that are not intentional, you're right. Mistakes are part of the learning process. However, highly effective leaders use these as personal reflection and learning opportunities or teachable moments for coaching and development.

Your second question is a tricky one. It involves understanding why middle managers might be doing what you're describing. In a low/mediocre performance culture, "blame storming" is common. That tends to build a culture of recrimination and even fear. This is usually coupled with very low to no recognition, celebration, and positive reinforcement when things are going well.

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So middle managers try to get positive strokes by taking personal credit and avoid blame by pointing fingers at others. You can read a series of excerpts and article I have written on teams and team leadership at www.clemmer.net/excerpts/e_t_leadership.shtml.

The CLEMMER Group's Business Model

I am often asked about how we've structured The CLEMMER Group's products and services, how they have evolved, and where I see our company going in the next few years. If you don't care, skip to the next article. If you'd like a "behind the scenes" look at our business, read on...

The CLEMMER Group's current revenue streams are roughly:

- 60% from my keynotes, workshops, and management team retreats
- 25% from a handful of highly selected associates delivering customized training and consulting services to our long-term Clients. This spins-off from my personal delivery or people finding us through my books or our web site.
- 15% from my books, workbooks, and CDs.

One of my goals in the next three - five years is to reduce the percentage of revenues I personally generate from fees while increasing our associates revenues and especially revenue from my books and related products and services. I plan to increase my writing, designing, and product development.

Our Central Models and Frameworks

My keynotes, workshop/retreats, and management team development services draw from a core of models frameworks that have evolved over years of our research, writing, and application. These implementation frameworks form the central structure for my books/materials, keynote presentations, workshops, management team retreats, and consulting using the appropriate frameworks for the service we are delivering.

- The Performance Balance (Technical, Management, and Leadership)
- Transformation Pathways
- Timeless Leadership Principles

[Click here](#) for a deeper look at our key models and frameworks.

[Click here](#) view slides and listen to my 90-minute archived teleconferences on *Leadership @ the Speed of Change*, *Developing a Customer-Centered Organization*, or *Building a High Performance Culture* using these models.

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Evolution of My Material and Business Model

During the eighties. I co-founded and lead The Achieve Group (starting in Edmonton and working with Art McNeil). By 1990, Achieve had become one of Canada's largest training and consulting company. While at Achieve, I began to give speeches at conferences and conventions and write magazine articles on leadership excellence (we were working with *In Search of Excellence* co-author Tom Peters at the time), customer service, and quality improvement.

This work evolved into my first book, *The VIP Strategy: Leadership Skills for Exceptional Performance*. It became a Canadian bestseller and was published in Europe and Japan.

My second book, *Firing on All Cylinders: The Service/Quality System for High-Powered Corporate Performance*, grew from our rapidly evolving work at Achieve in Canada and with Zenger Miller in the U.S. around service/quality improvement in the late eighties and early nineties. We were very fortunate to catch the Total Quality Management/Continuous Quality Improvement wave sweeping North America. This book was both a Canadian and American bestseller with over 100,000 copies sold. The model and material we built around all this work (management team retreats, "academy" to train internal implementation of our system, and extensive training modules) doubled our business in two years. It was the main reason Zenger Miller (now morphed into AchieveGlobal) offered to purchase The Achieve Group in 1991. Art McNeil and I accepted.

When I left Achieve/Zenger Miller in 1994, I went to work on my third book, *Pathways to Performance: A Guide to Transforming Yourself, Your Team, and Your Organization*. We built many of our workshops and materials around its "pathways model." In 1999, The CLEMMER Group published *Growing the Distance: Timeless Principles for Personal, Career, and Family Success*. This book was a lot of fun to write and most closely reflected my quirky humor (a few "Dad jokes" did slip in), stories and experiences, and personal philosophies. It was a very personal book that integrated The CLEMMER Group's newly developed "Leadership Wheel" model. Thankfully many readers have agreed and there are now over 100,000 copies of *Growing the Distance* in print. Most of my speaking engagements and workshops have built upon or used the book and the Leadership Wheel in some way. I continually receive very positive feedback on the book's magazine style format. Readers really like the short, modular sections with snappy headlines and introductory headings, story sidebars, pithy quotes, supported by main text. This allows for "grazing" or in-depth reading, according to the interest areas, focus, or available time of each reader.

So it was a no-brainer to publish *The Leader's Digest: Timeless Principles for Team and Organization Success* in 2003 with the same format again using the Leadership Wheel as the supporting structure for the book.

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Digital Marketing Has Been Key for Us

A very critical part of our business growth since 1996 has come from continuing to evolve our digital marketing efforts built around our web site as the central hub. Here are the key elements:

- **Web Site** – We have over 1,200 pages with more than 300 of my articles, book excerpts, and Globe & Mail columns, education and consulting services information and sales material, coming events, book outlines with free chapters and order forms, [Improvement Points](#) archive, the [Leader Letter](#) archive, workshop materials, on-line teleconference briefing announcements and archives, slide presentations on key content areas, and much more. My biggest project this year is totally revamping and updating our site and increasing our Internet marketing efforts (more to come on that soon).
- **Permission-Based Database/Mailing List** - We add participants from workshops, speaking engagements, training programs (who have indicated they want my newsletter and ongoing contact) and send a follow-up message. We also add people who have joined our mailing list, registered to view our on-line presentations, purchased product on-line, etc.
- **The [Leader Letter](#)** - Signing up is a key offer that I make to audience members at my engagements to complete our "Feedback and Follow-Up" form. Content draws from my books, observations/experiences, workbook "how-to" points, comments/feedback/questions from readers, upcoming public workshops, new products/services, and responses to people who e-mail me for advice with specific situations/issues. All monthly issues since it started in April of 2003 are archived on our web site at www.clemmer.net/news_main.shtml.
- **[Improvement Points](#)** - A free e-mail subscription service sending quotes from my books and columns/articles every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday to subscribers. Each one is only a sentence or two long. Readers can click on the tag line below the quote and go straight to the original article on our web site. These are all indexed and archived on our web site - which adds to the site's content.

A favorite hobby of mine is perennial gardening. I especially love the magic of springtime. After the winter months of death and decay throughout the garden, vigorous life and vitality is returning. I have used gardening analogies to illustrate personal, team, and organization leadership in both [Growing the Distance](#) and [The Leader's Digest](#). Knowing my farming background, some have accused me of spreading "organic fertilizer" in my work!

As I look ahead to our next few years, as in the garden, I am reminded of the need to continually prune out old ideas, approaches, and materials to make room for new growth. So we're busy chopping, moving, fertilizing and planting to continue growing and evolving The CLEMMER Group as this business continues to change.

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Favorite April Improvement Points

"The articles are awesome. They are down to earth and very applicable to what is going on in this world today."

Mary Ann Joyce, Dietary Services Manager, Shalom Manor, Grimsby, Ontario

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 April:

"To create something we must be something. For example, becoming a parent is easy; being one is tough. We can't teach our kids self-discipline unless we are self-disciplined. We can't help build strong organizational teams unless we're a strong team player."

- from Jim Clemmer's article, Changing Me to Change Them

Read the full article now!

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

"Spirit and meaning is a missing link in many lives, teams, and organizations. Many who have material prosperity live in spiritual poverty. That's what's driving the rapidly growing number of meaning seekers in society. We want to know that our lives count for something. We want to make a difference."

- from Jim Clemmer's article, With All My Heart and Soul

Read the full article now!

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

"We all draw a lot of energy from sincere recognition and honest appreciation. It's like a warm ray of verbal sunshine. We all know (and dread) the critics who carry big magnifying glasses around to get a good close look at everyone's imperfections."

- from Jim Clemmer's article, The Power of Recognition, Appreciation, and Celebration

Read the full article now!

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

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



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Feedback and Follow-Up

"I read the Jim Clemmer newsletter every month as a part of my continuing professional development. I find it both helpful and comforting quite often."

Susan Williams, Manager, Registration Department, College of Physicians & Surgeons of Nova Scotia

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

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