



Practical Leadership: Inspiring *Action*, Achieving Results

Jim Clemmer's Leader Letter

November 2006, Issue 44

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E-Learning, Me-Learning, and We-Learning

The October issue of *The Leader Letter* stimulated a number of excellent e-mails around "Pathways to Personal Learning", "Can E-Learning be More Effective?" and "Developing Young Leaders", (read the October issue at <http://www.clemmer.net/news/oct2006.html>). Below, I have condensed and published a selection of these.

These topics are interwoven and very timely. As Inter/Intranet use and tools continue their rapid growth, finding the right place for e-learning will become even more critical. As with any technology, e-learning can accelerate development, or waste time and money. Development of young people as they enter our organizations also becomes critical, given the huge wave of retiring baby boomers about to wash out our doors. Both of these learning and development issues are deeply affected by an organization's culture. High-performing organizations are both organizations full of learners, as well as learning organizations.

"As someone who taught at a college for 13 years and designed one of the first online courses in North America, then started a consulting firm, I have encountered e-learning challenges as a teacher, a learner, and a manager. While there are many factors at play, I see two keys to successful use of e-learning in the workplace: (1) the experience requires human interaction, and (2) there needs to be a 'contract' or obligation for people to participate.

"Traditional/live learning works because it involves people interacting with one another. E-learning must replicate that as much as possible. Static 'content' online doesn't do the trick.

"Traditional/live classes work because people make a commitment to be there – and others (teacher, manager, etc.) notice if they are absent. Organizations that are serious about e-learning are wise if they track and monitor participation.

"Even in our very first online course where students lived hours away from one another, we offered a beginning-of-course and end-of-course, face-to-face get together. We didn't expect that learners would want this (why travel when the learning is online?), but almost all participated. This just underscores the importance of human interaction in learning."
- Lorne Daniel, Managing Partner, Grandview Consulting Inc., Red Deer, AB, Canada

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"I'm taking a break from my day's work (creating an e-learning module!) and just read the New Reader's query about how to make e-learning more effective. She just finished university two years ago and has already dropped out of her company's leadership development program. To be hired by a company that provides so much education, including a voluntary 2-3 year leadership program, is a wonderful situation to be in! There's a need to review expectations – do the participants expect this to be a 'manager trainee' course, or a true leadership development program?"

"Maybe the 'something missing' is an understanding by the young professionals that leadership grows and develops and gets better as you practice it. It is not training that automatically confers on you the ability to lead (or the right to be promoted, for that matter). Or, perhaps the company has failed to clarify the goals of the training."

"Here are a couple of other thoughts:

- New Reader mentions having 'thousands' of courses available. They must have purchased off-the-shelf programs, or subscribe to a hosted site. The course content and delivery are likely generic and the same for each course. That can equal boring and pointless. If the company can afford to purchase access to that quantity of material, they can afford customization to help link course content to specific business drivers, as well as more specific employee needs.*
- Adults at work have a short attention span. Are the modules too long (more than 10 or 15 minutes)? Can they take away just the info they need, and skip the rest?"*
- Are there online discussion groups employees can use as a virtual classroom, so they get the benefit of others' insights?"*
- Maybe a 'needs assessment' is in order. What do employees think they need to do a better job? What do managers think their staff needs to know to do a better job?"*
- Is there a learning pathway associated with particular job descriptions? Does an employee know what will directly impact their current job and performance? Do they know what will help them move vertically or laterally in the company, or in their career?"*
- Is there any recognition for courses completed – not an electronic record or certificate, but acknowledgement from boss or peers?"*
- Is there any accountability – is the employee expected to share their learning with colleagues? Is there debrief or summary expected by the boss? Are there specific goals for improvement documented on a performance review?"*

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"Workplace learning often happens in a vacuum. The organization has mandatory education that employees must review annually (boring!). The employee is directed to get some remedial training for inadequate performance, or to 'take a class' to gain skills if they seek advancement. Workplace education still needs to be placed in context – help the employee to make the connection to specifics of their work, behavior, etc.

"E-learning is a wonderful tool that can make learning much more accessible, but it's not a panacea. Some thought needs to be given to how to make it relevant and engaging to a busy adult on the job."

- Diane Giansante, Corporate Educator, Pennsylvania

I have been back and forth a few times with "New Reader" as responses came in from her comments in the [October issue](#). Here are further thoughts and responses from her:

- *I agree with reviewing expectations. When we attend campus recruiting info sessions, I feel that we oversell the leadership development program and under-deliver when participants arrive (i.e. access to senior management, receive one-on-one mentoring with senior leader, attend leadership conferences/seminars). Today's university graduates have high expectations of what they want to get from their first career, especially those coming out of business school. Many top business schools constantly tell students they are the 'best of the best' and they will climb up the corporate ladder quickly by going through an intense business program. I was invited to our school's Opening Gala in September, as an alumnus, to welcome the incoming students. Every guest speaker told the students that they will succeed and are the 'best of the best' to get into the program. I felt they were being brainwashed.*
- *I agree that leadership is something that grows and develops and gets better as you practice it. However, I do think that as a young leader/entry level management professional, one needs a bit more guidance and structure at the beginning of our career (just like starting a new course when you're in school), even though most of the time we may learn from our mistakes or figure things out as we take on assignments. This is frustrating. What's missing is just taking the time to 'care' more about one's development. It's really that simple!*
- *Are we too busy to take the time to care about others development? Most managers and their employees seem to have project status update meetings instead of personal development meetings. We're often caught up with what needs to be done to fix a project, instead of what needs to be done to fix an employee's needs. This is what causes employee attrition.*

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- *Often e-learning courses are generic and take at least 2 - 3 hours to complete. But people don't take them because they don't find them useful. The main reason my role was created is to promote continuous learning and develop more customized learning. One of the key things I'm working on is developing learning paths for the various roles we have. The challenge I face is aligning what I'm working on, to all the other learning resources that are at our company. In other words, Human Resources is always doing their own thing (creating a corporate training and development model) and often don't communicate well to other functional teams what they are doing. This makes it confusing when someone finds something at the Human Resources site and has no clue whether it applies to their department.*

- New Reader

"Jim, as you mentioned, e-learning is great for specialized areas such as compliance, changes in legislation, product knowledge, or company information in induction programs, but is not very effective where divergent thinking, attitude shifts and behavioral changes are required, such as in many of the so called 'soft skills' (hate that expression) courses.

"There are also a number of other factors at work:

- *Some e-learning is simply awful - badly designed or over-engineered for the end user.*
- *Some e-learning is too generic to be truly effective and fails in the basics, which is 'know the end user' and 'what's in it for them.'*
- *E-learning is often sold as saving costs, which it can do, but only in the specialized areas mentioned above and if the courses are specifically designed for the audience concerned. There is no point in having a great library of e-learning courses if employees don't take advantage of it - a huge waste of expenditure.*
- *Often here in Australia, sales people of training products are not instructional designers and make claims for generic courses which are impossible to achieve and customization extends only to branding and some text changes, or else costs explode.*
- *Employees are not made accountable enough in their performance management for improving their skills and raising their value as assets to the company and developing their potential.*



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- *Companies often don't factor in extra hours for training, which means this is seen as 'taking people away from their jobs' rather than an embedded responsibility. So there is no culture of learning.*

"There is no quick fix. Cultural attitudes, adequate resourcing and investment in tailored design are required, along with accountability for managing staff development. These are all big and complex issues. But they are necessary for true effectiveness. E-learning of itself, is not the problem".

- E-Learning Designer and Learning and Development Manager

"Thanks, Jim, for your super-effective e-letter. I look forward to receiving it each month. Also, I recently purchased both Growing the Distance and The Leader's Digest, and they're already 'dog-eared'. Great offerings!

"Being too busy to learn is a common and frustrating obstacle. The solution lies in the context of an organization (culture or attitude toward life-long learning), which is set and influenced by the leadership.

"It doesn't take long for a bright, young, new recruit to look around the organization and determine what values are simply talked about and which ones really matter. If the culture doesn't really value learning, then it will be apparent by the reinforcement systems, or lack thereof. What agreements are struck between employee and boss regarding new learning? What happens when one fails to comply? Does the habit of new learning pay off through selection for promotion? If the culture from the top down reinforces and supports life-long learning as a valued habit, then e-learning tools will be more effectively accessed and applied. Unfortunately, companies that implement an e-learning resource, with little energy and excitement about why and how, and little or no top management involvement, usually experience disappointing user results. While this is a major undertaking (shifting a culture), it needs to be candidly discussed if maximum return on an e-learning tool is to be realized.

"I agree with Professor Fullerton, that helping the manager to establish his/her own 'gaps' will build stronger commitment from that manager (see "[Pathways to Personal Learning](http://www.clemmer.net/news/oct2006.html)" in the October issue at <http://www.clemmer.net/news/oct2006.html>). Taking one or two strengths and challenges, establishing the growth gap, and demonstrating how the e-learning tool can help them close the gaps, will strengthen engagement. He is also correct in suggesting that the process be structured, but that the freedom to choose what to work on remains with the employee. But again, the promotion process needs to support those who invest the time and effort to grow. Other things being equal, if self-learning doesn't tip the promotion scales in favor of the learner, where is the incentive to make the extra effort?

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"Another suggestion is to formally measure growth, but not to use measurement as an oppressive tool. Many companies do not include 360 feedback and project work in their formal performance evaluations, so as not to discourage the employee from working on those issues. Changing behavior is much more difficult than hitting budget numbers! The act of learning must be treated with energy, excitement and positive attitude, especially by senior management.

"There are e-learning systems that are completely customizable to the particular using company. This allows posting of company legends, stories, successes, fabulous failures, and best practices. A manager facing a particular challenge can access the topic in an on-line tool kit, and learn not only current theory and 'how to' action steps, but can also learn what others in his/her own company have done in the past that worked. Customized web sites act like gravity; pulling users into the system to experience the feeling of belonging, catch up on the company 'scoop', and also to learn new skills and habits. It is similar to the old trading-post boards in supermarkets; you can't walk by it without looking!"
- Michael Darmody, Principal, Darmody & Company, Mississauga, ON, Canada

Engaging Head or Heart: Information versus Communication

"Hi Jim,

*"I always enjoy your newsletter and recently ran across the article about 'informing vs. communicating'. I really like the chart (see this chart and short excerpt at http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/speaking_success.shtml taken from pages 189 to 195 of *The Leader's Digest*). So many people forget about the importance of creating dialogue, using stories to engage the audience. At a recent conference, the presentations I remember the most were the ones that used great stories and analogies to deliver the messages. (My favorite was the 'Cat in the Box' story from FedEx Canada CEO - a great story about client experience, employee empowerment, etc. http://www.projo.com/words/2004/20040710_st.htm)."*

- Cheryl Fletcher, Organizational Change Communications, RBC Financial Group, Toronto, ON

Hi Cheryl,

Thanks for your feedback on *The Leader Letter* and the information/communication chart. We're certainly in strong agreement with each other. Bullet points, business cases, and logical reasoning appeals to our heads. Dialogue and stories engage our hearts. We need both in our lives. But like so many of us, what you took from and remember about the Vancouver IABC conference, is what

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engaged your heart. We really are emotional creatures. We're moved by how we feel, or our intuition and then we look for the logic to support our feelings.

Jim

The Final (and Fatal) Ten Percent

Many managers want to increase engagement, ownership, and commitment to the team and organization. This is becoming a huge crisis as retention, innovation, service/quality improvement and the like, become major organization performance issues.

A common complaint of people who aren't highly engaged or don't feel very committed to their team or organization, is micromanagement. Micromanagement shows up in many ways to convey a perceived lack of trust or too much "snoopervision." One way that low-engagement managers often don't recognize, is the trap of "The Final 10 Percent." That is when I, as a member of your team, come up with an idea or plan that you, the manager, is in about 90% agreement with. But many managers want to make it perfect by adding their ideas, or restating it in their language. In doing so, they often reduce ownership and commitment because they have shifted it from 'my' idea/plan to 'your' idea/plan. The extra 5 or 10% improvement in the idea often comes with a 30 – 50% reduction in ownership and commitment to seeing it implemented.

Thoughts That Make You Go Hmmm...on Fostering Engagement and Ownership

"One man's way may be as good as another, but we all like our own best."

- Jane Austen, 18th Century English author

"...one of the most common challenges that successful people face, is a constant need to win. When the issue is important, they want to win. When the issue is trivial, they want to win. Even when the issue isn't worth the effort or is clearly to their disadvantage, they still want to win."

"If you find yourself saying, 'Great idea, but . . .', try cutting your response off at 'idea'. Even better, take a breath before you speak, and ask yourself if what you're about to say is worthwhile."

- Marshall Goldsmith, Executive coach and founding director of the Alliance for Strategic Leadership.

"We are usually convinced more easily by reasons we have found ourselves than by those which have occurred to others."

- Blaise Pascal, 17th French scientist and mathematician

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"Few managers would deny that there has been little growth in empowerment over the last 30 years. But why that is so remains a riddle. The answer is complex. The change programs and practices we employ are full of inner contradictions that cripple innovation, motivation, and drive...managers love empowerment in theory, but the command-and-control model is what they trust and know best."

- Chris Argyris, psychologist and sociologist, Professor Emeritus at Harvard Business School

"A creative organizer creates an organization that can function well without him. When a creative leader has done his work, his followers will say, 'We have done it ourselves,' and feel that they can do great things without a leader. With the noncreative, it is the other way around: in whatever they do, they arrange things so that they themselves become indispensable."

- Eric Hoffer, author (often called "the longshoreman philosopher")

"Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do and they will surprise you with their ingenuity."

- George S. Patton, Jr., American General

Favorite October *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 October.

"Highly effective leaders boost the energy of others with their passion and appreciation. They engage people's hearts as well as their minds. They get them involved and participating."

- from Jim Clemmer's article, "Growing the Leader in Us"

[Read the full article now!](#)

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



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"If you're trying to move your team toward self-management, you need to lead as if you are driving a car on an icy road. Guide and intervene with a light touch. Sudden, jerky changes will send the team into a skid."

- from Jim Clemmer's article, "Pathways and Pitfalls to Leading Teams"

[Read the full article now!](#)

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

"Our own feeling of accomplishment is a matter of perception. It's easy to focus on what we haven't yet achieved. We can drain our own energy by dwelling on our setbacks and disappointments."

- 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

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

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