



## Practical Leadership: Inspiring *Action*, Achieving Results

### Jim Clemmer's Leader Letter

October 2005, Issue 31

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#### Refusing to be Victimized by a Bad Boss

*Jim,*

*That article on bad bosses is fabulous (to read it go to [www.clemmer.net/news/sept2005.html#bad](http://www.clemmer.net/news/sept2005.html#bad))! I just ran into the evil variety last spring and you're right - get out of that reporting relationship. One of the best things I ever did.*

*Did you ever consider becoming a journalist? You're a great writer!*

**- Judith Robinson, Freelance Writer and Instructor of Writing Courses for The University of Western Ontario and the University of Toronto's School of Continuing Studies**

Hi Judith,

Thanks very much for your feedback on my article and writing skills. I am glad to hear that you refused to be a victim of an evil boss.

I do enjoy writing very much. I feel like I get the best of the journalist world and also get to apply my writing in my workshops, speaking, and retreats. Although the juggling can get tricky, it is the best of all worlds.

Jim

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Sherry's message below is a great example of turning the article on bad bosses around for a deep look in the mirror. The key leadership question is: am I one of those bosses that send people home at night with their stomachs twisted in knots and popping headache pills while passing their stress and frustration on to their loved ones?

*Hi Jim,*

*In reading this last issue about bad bosses, I have always been amazed at how these people actually get to be in these positions, knowing how much energy, skill, natural talent, and patience is needed to be in leadership positions. As the CEO of a 145-bed Personal Care Home and working with upwards of 270 staff, I can have NO bad days. My staff model what I do, and it is incredibly important to ensure they are getting the best of me so in turn, the residents receive the best care that can be given.*

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*I look forward to your monthly newsletters, and pass them along to my Senior Management Group. Thank you for sharing your words of wisdom, the clarity with which you provide information, and for being a bright spot in my day when the newsletter arrives. I have every one of your books, and they are a part of how I work with others.*

**- Sherry Janzen, Chief Executive Officer, Salem Home, Winkler, MB**

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I'd love to hear your experiences and strategies on dealing with a bad boss – or discovering that you were one until you developed your leadership skills. Please e-mail me at [Jim.Clemmer@Clemmer.net](mailto:Jim.Clemmer@Clemmer.net).

**Too Much Manager Bashing?**

*Hello Jim,*

*I've been a long time fan but am beginning to be turned off with the negativism (manager bashing). I used to pass on many of your Improvement Points to our management team (I call your articles food for thought) but haven't lately because the message that comes across is "You aren't doing such and such".*

*Is there any way of turning the message into something more positive? For example, today's missive: "Many managers haven't probed too deeply into their own sense of personal spirit and meaning. Many are not living purposeful lives of meaning..." Could this not be turned into: "It is important for managers to probe into their own sense of personal spirit and meaning. Work can be a rich source of connection to your spirit, giving more purpose and meaning to your life..."*

*The former beats people down. The latter provides encouragement and hope.*

*Regards,*

*"Mary"*

Hi "Mary",

Thanks very much for raising your concerns. Feedback like yours is very useful for me to review my approaches and deepen my own understanding of what I am doing with my writing and tools and services like Improvement Points (go to [www.clemmer.net/improvement.shtml](http://www.clemmer.net/improvement.shtml) to subscribe).

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Since I got one other reaction like yours to the same Improvement Point on the same day, I took a few days to reflect on your comments. I actually went back over the last two months (August and July) of Improvement Points we sent out. During that time, twenty-three Improvement Points messages were e-mailed to subscribers. In re-reading each one of those, seven were clearly critical of managers and another four Improvement Points were neutral - the reader could decide which message fits best for them (e.g. "Navigators choose to make things happen. Survivors watch things happen. Victims complain bitterly that 'this crap is always happening to me.'").

Seven critical Improvement Points out of twenty-three is a ratio I am quite comfortable with. Part of this comes from the nature of Improvement Points and my approach to writing and speaking. Each Improvement Point is an excerpt from a free column, article or book excerpt of the more than three hundred on our web site. We step through the twenty-two subjects in our article index (and Improvement Points) one at time with each Improvement Point (go to [www.clemmer.net/articles.shtml](http://www.clemmer.net/articles.shtml) to review the subject index). When I write a book - and often an article - I follow a formula that is roughly Problem-Solution-Benefits. I may not always follow that sequence exactly and the solutions stage will generally be much larger with lots of practical examples and/or how to points. So this approach would be reflected in the seven of out twenty-three critical or problem Improvement Points since those excerpts would have come from that front part of the article or excerpt. Most of the rest of that same article or excerpt would contain positive examples, comments, or how-to points.

One of the reasons I dwell on the problems section with managers and selected these comments for Improvement Points is because there are a number of people in management jobs who should not be there. They became managers for the wrong reasons or really need help improving their effectiveness. I touched on this from a different angle in my lead article in the September *Leader Letter* (to read the full article go to [www.clemmer.net/excerpts/bad\\_boss.shtml](http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/bad_boss.shtml)) when I reproduced my Globe & Mail article and wrote "...most bad bosses don't mean it. They are good people doing a bad job. Many are blithely unaware of the dead, wounded or stressed-out bodies they leave in their wake. They even think they're good examples of leadership." This front section of the article (which is again pointing out the problem before providing solutions and how-to points) then goes on to try and help understand why good people often become bad managers. So the smaller percentage of critical comments I make about bad management is an attempt to help ineffective managers recognize themselves and feel enough pain to do something about it.

Some top marketing copy writers feel that if you're not getting under the skin of your audience with emotional jolts that will really anger some people, you're not writing compelling copy. The stated philosophy of one of the top international experts in the copy writing field is "If you're not (teeing) off a few people, you're writing bland and unemotional copy." I prefer to see it more as providing the grain of sand or irritant to the oyster. It's up to the oyster whether to reject it or use the problem/issue to spin their own pearl around.

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"Mary," thanks so much for causing me to look deeper at the point you raised. As with all Improvement Points (and much advice in life), I'd invite you to delete those that are irrelevant, read the full article for those that resonate with you, and pass along the ones that reinforce learning or a message you think would be useful to other colleagues.

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

Jim

*Dear Jim,*

*Thank you. I'm very impressed with your speedy and detailed reply. You obviously practice what you preach.*

*It has been my experience that bad managers know they aren't 'good' managers (even if they won't fully admit it), and your articles provide knowledge and insight. You are providing a light at the end of a long dark tunnel or many lights at the ends of many shorter tunnels two thirds of the time, and it is very helpful. I'll continue to pass them along.*

*Regards,*

*"Mary"*

**More on Why Common Sense Leadership Principles Aren't Common Practice**

*Hello Jim,*

*I may be taking an overly simplistic approach to the question posed by one of your readers from England re: "I'm astonished at how good basic common sense reads as a revelation; even more confusing to me, is why it is so difficult for me to share such good practice with managers who are operating with an altogether 'different' philosophy and getting it wrong!?" (to read the section from last month's issue go to [www.clemmer.net/news/sept2005.html#common](http://www.clemmer.net/news/sept2005.html#common)) ... but I believe the problem is that we look for complex solutions when all along the answer may be a K.I.S.S (keep it simple, stupid). When push comes to shove I've most often found that the "simpler the better." As we implement that philosophy in our everyday work-lives, we will get positive results more often than not. Positive results get noticed and copied, and on we go ... (Not very glamorous - but highly effective!)*

**- Doug Hyde, HR Manager, Can-Oat Milling**

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**Thoughts That Make You Go Hmmm...on Reflection and Awareness**

**"Emotional self-awareness is the foundation on which most of the other elements of emotional intelligence are built, the necessary first step toward exploring and coming to understand yourself, and toward change. Obviously, what you don't recognize you can't manage. If you aren't aware of what you're doing, why you're doing it and the way it's affecting others, you can't change. If, in your own blinkered view, there's nothing wrong, then there's no need or reason to change. That's why self-awareness is key and basic."**

- Steven J. Stein, Ph.D. & Howard E. Book, *The EQ Edge*

**"The eye cannot see its own lashes."**

- Chinese Proverb

**"Some people drink from the fountain of knowledge, others just gargle."**

- Robert Newton Anthony, *American writer*

**"Authentic leadership begins with self-awareness, or knowing yourself deeply. Self-awareness is not a trait you are born with but a capacity you develop throughout your lifetime. It's your understanding of your strengths and weaknesses, your purpose in life, your values and motivations, and how and why you respond to situations in a particular way. It requires a great deal of introspection and the ability to internalize feedback from others."**

- William George, former *chairman and CEO of Medtronic*

**"Everyone, according to an ancient legend, is born into the world with two bags suspended from his neck. A small bag in front full of his neighbors' faults, and a large bag behind filled with his own faults. Hence it is that men are quick to see the faults of others, and yet are often blind to their own failing."**

- Aesop

**More on Becoming a Professional Speaker**

The following e-mail from Larry Beckon obviously makes me feel good! It also reinforces what an astute observer Larry really is! But the main reason I share it is because he gets to the heart of what's key to being a professional speaker or leader in any field of expertise we pursue.

*Jim: I am sending you this note because of the question and response in your September Leader Letter about becoming a professional speaker (to read the article go to [www.clemmer.net/news/sept2005.html#pro](http://www.clemmer.net/news/sept2005.html#pro)). Someone sent you a note asking for your advice on how to become a motivational speaker. My perspective is that being a speaker is not the issue, being the right kind of person is the issue.*

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*In 2002 you spoke at the Michigan Department of Transportation Leadership Annual Conference (MDOT). We did not hire you because you were a good speaker (we had looked at video tapes of you and knew you were a good speaker), we hired you because of what we believed you knew, who we believed you were as a person, and how likely we believed it was that you would focus on meeting the needs of those persons attending the conference. MDOT has tended to look with major concern at persons who market themselves as motivational speakers. We have learned that motivation comes from within, not from a "motivational speaker." We can all think of "motivational speakers" who we have heard and then forgotten about in a few days. Our concern is to help leaders at MDOT become better leaders. Our ability to lead depends upon who we are and upon our successful efforts to become better leaders.*

*We were very impressed with what you knew about leadership and your experience in using that leadership to help organizations improve their results, and in helping others learn and grow. We were also impressed with your customer focus - you wanted to know what we wanted you to help us accomplish. I remember you sitting during the lunch hour in a work area we had at the conference, making changes to your PowerPoint presentation so that your messages would be better aligned with speakers who were on the program in the morning.*

*Thank you for your leadership.*

**- Larry Beckon, Michigan Department of Transportation**

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*Hi.....it was great coming across your site while searching for a publisher. I look forward to reading more about you as a speaker. I recently joined Toastmasters to build my presentation and oratory skills. I am not one of those people who would rather die than stand in front of a crowd and speak. Actually, I look forward to getting up and empowering people. My goal mission...purpose in life is to speak out against abuse and violence against women, empowering and inspiring women to rise up and take control of their lives and achieve excellence and greatness no matter what hands life may have dealt them. I think the ability to speak eloquently and to change people's thinking or perspective about life and cause them to take some sort of action is an admirable skill to possess. I am in awe of great speakers. I listen with my heart paused to receive every word. Congratulations on your CSP designation (to read the article go to [www.clemmer.net/news/may2003.html#csp](http://www.clemmer.net/news/may2003.html#csp)). I aim to reach there one day.*

*All the best and many blessings to you.*

*"Cynthia"*

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Hi "Cynthia"

Good for you for having such a clear focus and sense of mission. You sure need to pursue that dream. The world needs lots of healing and inspiration to act like Navigators (see the March 2004 *Leader Letter* for a short article on the Navigator-Survivor-Victim chart at [www.clemmer.net/news/mar2004.html](http://www.clemmer.net/news/mar2004.html)) and take control. Many oppressed women need the message you are preparing yourself to deliver. Coming from such a depth of conviction and purpose along with studying the art of connecting with audiences, I am sure you'll become one of those great speakers that you admire.

May you heal and empower many women with your important work.

Jim

**Top Improvement Points from September**

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:

**"An old bit of Texas wisdom teaches us that "you can put your boots in the oven, but that don't make them biscuits." Leaders know that nothing kills passion and commitment in their organization more than bad hiring and promotion decisions. That's why leaders spend a huge amount of time assessing new people they are hiring and everyone they're considering promoting."**

- from *Leaders Foster Individual Passion for Change and Improvement*  
[www.clemmer.net/excerpts/leaders\\_foster.shtml](http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/leaders_foster.shtml)

**"The best middle leaders provide strong leadership up, down, and across the organization. They use influence, persuasion, "tempered radicalism" (Change-leaders use their anger or energy to alternatively heat and cool their approaches as they become tougher and stronger.), networking, and other skills to lead at the speed of change."**

- from *Strong Leaders Use Language to Paint Word Pictures*  
[www.clemmer.net/excerpts/str\\_leaders.shtml](http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/str_leaders.shtml)

**"The best middle leaders provide strong leadership up, down, and across the organization. They use influence, persuasion, "tempered radicalism" (Change-leaders use their anger or energy to alternatively heat and cool their approaches as they become tougher and stronger.), networking, and other skills to lead at the speed of change."**

- from *Being a Strong Leader Despite a Bad Boss*  
[www.clemmer.net/excerpts/being\\_astrong.shtml](http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/being_astrong.shtml)

Subscribe or view the archives by topic area at [www.clemmer.net/improvement.shtml](http://www.clemmer.net/improvement.shtml).



**JIM CLEMMER**

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

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

Jim

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