



Practical Leadership:

Inspiring *Action*, Achieving Results

Jim Clemmer's Leader Letter

September 2006, Issue 42

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"Too Busy to Learn"

The following two e-mails came in response to last month's lead story "Too Busy to Learn". Both readers make good points about learning and improving.

Good Morning Jim!

I read the above article today from your August issue of The Leader Letter. I would like to add a comment on this topic. I believe that today, we stress the 'formal' learning process to the point that we have forgotten or overlook the 'informal' channel and opportunities. I once had one of my staff say to me... "but I am too busy to learn". My response was...

Me.... "Have you not talked to anyone today?"

Staff.... "Yes, naturally I have."

Me.... "And who may that have been?"

Staff.... "I have talked with a large number of people from team mates, to peers, to customers, to our suppliers."

Me.... "And did you listen to what they said?"

Staff.... "Naturally."

Me.... " So, did you learn anything from those conversations?"

Staff.... "Yes, I did."

He then proceeded to list all that he had learned during the conversations that had taken place that day.

Me.... "So how can you say you are too busy to learn? Look at all that you have learned and in just one day. Now think of what you said to them and what they learned from you. If you both learned as much as you claimed to have, then think of how much further ahead we all are. Don't take for granted the information sharing process."

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Naturally, the words may not be exact as it was some time ago, but I believe that you will appreciate where I am coming from with this example. The problem is not only that the staff are too busy to learn, but the leadership is too busy to lead their staff's thought process in the right direction.

Regards,

- Joanne Vallat, Regina, SK, Canada

Whenever I hear someone tell me that they "don't have time to learn", I always find it useful to ask them to substitute the word "improve" for the word "learn" and then ask how they like the result.

"Learning" is a sometimes cold-blooded exercise that is easy to dismiss, whereas "improving" is an unarguably desirable goal that leaves no wiggle-room for procrastination. Learning isn't just some necessary evil that we were finished with after our schooling, but a lifelong process that is indispensable to our continuing growth and improvement as human beings.

Therefore, the phrase "I don't have time to learn", is actually equivalent to "I don't have time to improve". This latter sentiment is poison to both our professional development and to our own fulfillment as individuals, and the act of casting it into such stark equivalence, strips the original sentiment of its detachment and unveils what is really at stake.

- Barry Chow, Executive Vice President, Resiance Corporation, Calgary, AB, Canada

My Personal Learning Habits

In response to last month's ["Too Busy to Learn"](#), a subscriber sent me this e-mail:

Thank you for continuing to provide 'free' newsletters. I always enjoy reading them and find them inspiring. I was wondering though... how does someone like you keep your skills current? When do you have the time?

This was an excellent question that caused me to step back and reflect on my own learning. It was a great time to do a 'personal learning inventory'. This is an exercise I highly recommend periodically. What better time to do it than in September, when many learning institutions start back up again.

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With an extremely busy Client and travel schedule, learning and staying current is a big challenge. Here's what I do:

- Take reading material with me everywhere I go, whether on my many business trips, or just a trip to the dentist for that 10 minute wait.
- Subscribe to a few dozen e-newsletters, magazines, journals, newspapers, and e-zines in the fields of personal, team, and organization effectiveness . Many I just skim for any new items, research, or articles I may want to read further. My first choice is always reading in digital format (we have a wireless network in our house that I connect to my notebook computer), because I copy and paste the item, research, or quote into my electronic database. In cases like *Fortune* magazine or *Harvard Business Review* I may read the hard copy, mark what I want to copy and file, and then go to their web site to do that.
- When I am at home, my day starts with a run on the treadmill, a shower, breakfast, and then reading a passage from a spiritual or personal growth book followed by meditation. Currently, I am re-reading *The Power of Now*, by Eckhart Tolle.
- I belong to the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers (CAPS). This gives me a monthly magazine and an audio CD from the National Speaker's Association, as well as the CAPS newsletter. The CAPS annual conference (which I always attend) and NSA's annual conference (which I don't get to every year), are full of workshops and networking for, by, and with other professional speakers and workshop/retreat leaders.
- Writing is a constant learning opportunity for me. A big part of this comes from reviewing research and articulating my position, point of view, advice, or experience on that topic. When I write my *Globe & Mail* pieces, the editors are constantly pushing back on my thinking, content, or prose and helping me to clarify or re-state what I am trying to say. Feedback and inquiries from readers continue my learning process.
- Delivering workshops, retreats, and keynote presentations is often filled with much learning as I field responses, lead discussions, and get feedback on my ideas or approaches. I can think of a few ideas like 'embrace change,' where I have dramatically changed my views through this process and dialogue.
- Customizing or preparing for my workshops or retreats requires me to spend time learning more about the organization I am working with, what's working and not working for them, and helping them to integrate past and future leadership programs, projects, or pathways toward broader developmental goals.

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- I attend a lot of conferences as a speaker. In just one year, I get to hear many effective and not so effective, internal and external speakers. This gives me great examples of what to do and not to do in connecting with audiences, as well as new insights into emerging trends and approaches in personal, team, or organization development.
- I almost always get written feedback forms and/or verbal reflections at the end of my speaking engagements, workshops, or retreats.
- Since we began in 1994, my CLEMMER Group colleagues have been, and continue to be, a big source of learning. Currently, Scott Schwyer and Karen Lee are working extensively with a few CLEMMER Group Clients to help them implement the organization and leadership plans we first kicked off with a senior management retreat. This work usually stretches over a few years. We learn first-hand what does and doesn't work in bringing about culture change, service or quality improvement, increasing productivity, developing leaders, and so on. Scott and Karen are particularly gifted at consulting and training design and very tuned-in to the latest tools, trends, and techniques. I learn a lot from them.
- In my car, I listen to audio CD's or tapes of conferences or workshops that I'd like to attend if time permits.
- Writing *The Leader Letter* each month is a dynamic process, especially as it's evolved to including many comments from readers as well as questions raised. The current question that prompted my response, is a perfect example. This has caused me to reflect on my learning and review what I am doing and how effective it is.

I feel pretty passionate about this topic and my continued personal growth. At risk of totally 'over-answering' this question, here's an outline of a two-part article on our web site that digs deeper into many of these personal growth areas:

Personal Improvement Planning Pathways and Pitfalls (Part One) (Part Two)

Daily or even just weekly, small stretches accumulate into powerful new habits and ever-stronger discipline muscles. Discover the 'Personal Improvement Planning' approaches that can help you to avoid the pitfalls and pave your pathway to success.

I'd love to hear how you personally learn, or what you've found helps others to learn, grow, and develop. Please send me your thoughts and experiences on a 'need to grow' basis at Jim.Clemmer@Clemmer.net.

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Contribute an Amazon Book Review?

This summer our son, Chris, worked with me on various Internet marketing projects before moving to Ottawa to start law school at the University of Ottawa this month. One of those projects is adding further reviews of *Growing the Distance* and *The Leader's Digest* to Amazon.com and our own web site (which is being completely overhauled).

If you have enjoyed either or both books and would like to contribute a review, we would be most appreciative. Should you wish to help out, please respond to Betty.Kaita@Clemmer.net and she will send you the easy steps to post a review.

As a token of our appreciation, we will hold a draw for \$100 worth of my leadership development books, workbooks, or CDs. But time is limited! This draw will be held at the end of September 2006 and will be based on the reviews that *appear* on Amazon's web site *prior* to *September 15, 2006*.

Moving from Victim to Navigator

A subscriber who "has read *The Leader's Digest* for about the 6th or 7th time" (he's going to know the book better than me!), sent an e-mail asking about the section in the book entitled "Steering the Course" (page 59), where I discuss the three choices of Navigator, Survivor, or Victim. This discussion is always one of the high points during my presentations and workshops. He asks:

"In your experience, when a person chooses to move forward from victim to navigator, do they make a stop at survivor or in most cases is it a case of straight to navigator, so to speak? What sort of time frame has been about the average in your professional experience for a person to make this transition in their life? Also, how do you link the three steps together when trying to get people from the victim mentality to the navigator mentality?"

Navigator, Survivor, or Victims are modes or thought patterns we go through when dealing with difficult changes, adversity, or crisis situations. Generally, these all involve loss of some type - health, money, status, loved ones, relationships, jobs, etc. How we habitually explain those losses to ourselves make up our explanatory style. It's all too easy to put on our Victim glasses and explain these negative events in ways that make us feel helpless, hopeless, and persecuted. The key is how long and often we use Victim explanations, versus Navigator explanations. In Navigator mode, we are hopeful, optimistic, and opportunistic. We are looking to make the best of a bad situation or even figure out how to capitalize on, or use the loss as catalyst for effective change.



JIM CLEMMER

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How long it takes us to move from Victim to Navigator mode is extremely variable. It depends upon the size of the loss, our perceived power/control over the situation, and our habitual explanatory style. The first step is awareness of our Victim thinking and the desire to change it. If that doesn't happen, we'll be riding the Bitter Bus around Pity City from Pity Party to Pity Party for a very long time - possibly the rest of our lives. If we do want to change, it may take a lot of work, help, and time to make a habit out of seeing the possibilities (rather than just the problems) and becoming more optimistic and positive in outlook and approach – acting like a true leader.

In the March 2004 issue of *The Leader Letter*, there's a short article on the Navigator-Survivor-Victim chart (with a graphic) at <http://www.clemmer.net/news/mar2004.html> and pass it along to others. The April issue continues a follow up discussion from some readers, sparked by this chart. Earlier this year I published a longer article on this approach, entitled "[Navigating Change and Adversity.](#)"

Leadership for Developing Navigator Kids

I am always especially gratified to hear examples of parents teaching their young children a 'Navigator' or 'Leadership' mindset at home. *Growing the Distance: Timeless Principles for Personal and Career Success* was written to help readers take these leadership concepts out in that broader application beyond organizational life. Jeff Johnson told me earlier this year of how he was using material from my books with his family. Here's the P.S. on that e-mail:

"You would have smiled this afternoon as my wife and I were playing Monopoly with our three children, when our 6 year old said to our 8 year old, "It looks like you're in Pity City" after he complained when he didn't get the property he wanted!"

Recently, he sent this family growth update:

"Your thoughts have truly caught hold in the family. In the last week or so, I have heard my kids saying to each other, "Uh oh, are you getting THE Virus...the Victimitis Virus?" and "Listen. Do you hear that? It sounds like the Bitter Bus just pulled into the driveway!" Our two cures have been to take 'positive choice therapy' and to wear our armor – 'the attitude of gratitude'."

- Jeff Johnson, Marketing Manager – Africa, Pioneer, A Dupont Company



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Thoughts That Make You Go Hmmm...on the 'Victimitis Virus'

"If belligerence puts people at risk, science increasingly shows that a life of quiet desperation does, too. Study after study has now confirmed that factors like social isolation, depression and poor marital relations can contribute to heart disease. Patients who are depressed at the time of bypass surgery are more than twice as likely to die in the next five years as patients without clinical depression, although their disease is of comparable severity."

- Anne Underwood, "For a Happy Heart," *Newsweek*

"Attitudes are contagious, mine might kill you."

- Despair.com

"People with an external locus of control see the world as controlling them; they are subject to the forces of other people, chance, or of 'fate.' Obviously, both conditions exist at the same time; I determine if I will brush my teeth this morning or not, but I also recognize that there is precious little I can do about the Chinese government's one-child policy or the weather. But the proportion of things which individuals put in each category can vary quite dramatically, and this factor has been shown to be related to a number of different aspects of health and stress."

- Daniel Moerman, *Meaning, Medicine and the 'Placebo Effect'*

"When you blame others, you give up your power to change."

- Douglas Noel Adams, British novelist

"Resilience is a reflex, a way of facing and understanding the world, that is deeply etched into a person's mind and soul. Resilient people and companies face reality with staunchness, make meaning of hardship instead of crying out in despair, and improvise solutions from thin air."

- Diane L. Coutu senior editor at *Harvard Business Review* specializing in psychology and business. "How Resilience Works," *Harvard Business Review*

"You have to take it as it happens, but you should try to make it happen the way you want to take it."

- German Proverb

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"If you went through a dangerously contagious hospital ward, you would, immediately upon leaving, engage in hygiene practices. What about psychological hygiene? What about that dreaded disease optical rectumitis (a sh* outlook on life)? When contaminating influences come into your world, do you take time to wash up, to bring your perception back to where you want it to be by engaging in good mental hygiene practices that allow you to move forward?"**

- Peter Jensen, *The Inside Edge: High Performance Through Mental Fitness*

Favorite August 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 August.

"The popular goals of security, stability, and predictability are deadly. The closer we get to these dangerous goals, the more our growth is stunted. True and lasting security comes from constant growth and development, based on regular R&R (reflection and renewal)."

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

Read the full article now!

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

"Not all experience is equal. Experience isn't what happens to us, it's what we do with what happens to us. There's a major difference between growth experiences and stagnating experience. Just because we've shown up year after year and put in the time, doesn't mean we've gained by the experience."

- from Jim Clemmer's article, "Signs of Stagnation"

Read the full article now!

<http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/stagnation.shtml>



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*"Classified ad: "Parachute for sale. Only used once, never opened, small stain."
When it comes to sky diving, if at first I don't succeed — my worries are over. Few
learning experiences are that deadly. However, learning impaired people treat
many new experiences as if they were. Fear of failure is a huge killer of
innovation and learning."*

- from Jim Clemmer's article, "Successful Failures"

Read the full article now!

<http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/successful.shtml>

Feedback and Follow-Up

"Thanks for your articles - I like the way you keep it real!"

**- Jennifer Blake, Organizational Development Officer - Management
Development, Manor Farm Centre, Rushall, Walsall, UK**

*"I subscribe to The Leader Letter, and appreciate the gems - always common sense - that
are regularly presented. I value the positive, practical tips and comments that I can apply at
work and in other everyday contacts."*

**- Lois Thiessen, Assistant to the President & CEO, North Shore Credit Union,
North Vancouver, BC**

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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