

Jim Clemmer's Leader Letter



JIM CLEMMER

Practical Leadership:
From Inspiration to Application

JimClemmer.com

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JUNE 2009, ISSUE 75

I really have growth on the brain these days. Partly because June is the most magical time of year in my garden. As I look out from my office, the garden is an explosion of greenery, colorful flowers, chirping birds, squirrels, and chipmunks.

A big part of what got us growing on the other side of our office windows is work on my new book, *Growing @ the Speed of Change*. We're now editing, laying out pages, and preparing for its fall publication. I'm also growing full speed at redesigning and revising in-house versions of my most popular workshops, drawing from the extensive research and revamping of our Navigator/Survivor/Victim model. The first workshop I am updating is our most popular one for management participants entitled [Leading @ the Speed of Change](#). The other variation of this material is for frontline staff as either [Growing @ the Speed of Life](#) or [Navigating Change and Adversity](#).

The first three items in this month's issue draw from my new *Growing @ the Speed of Change* book. Think of them as a little spring fertilizer!

PERMANENT IMPERMANENCE: UNCHANGING CYCLES OF CHANGE

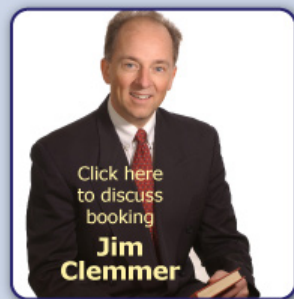
Last month I participated in a conference call with a small group of professional speakers and workshop leaders debating the worldwide societal and organizational changes we're currently experiencing. It was a continuation of the discussion from my April blog posting ("What in the World is Happening Today?") at <http://www.jimclemmer.com/blog/?p=697>.

I still have the scars from starting in this business during the sharp and very difficult recession of the early eighties. For those of you too young to remember, unemployment rates soared to well over 10% and interest rates near 20%! The first chapter of my first book (*The VIP Strategy*), published in 1988 was "World of Change, World of Challenge." As a student of history, I'm fascinated by the huge changes many societies have gone through. During those times some people believed changes were leading to a positive future and others were convinced the world was ending.

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What I draw from this historical perspective is that life is – and has always been – unpredictable, turbulent, and chaotic. Nature abhors stability, predictability, and sameness. The seasons of life follow eternally repeating patterns of birth, growth, decline, and death. That makes room for renewal and another cycle begins. Often the cycles don't play out in a stable and orderly way. We may see bursts of growth – like the mid part of this decade – that feel like abundance and expansion will go on forever. The trees will grow to the sky.

Then when we least expect it – as we saw last fall – a storm springs up and instantly destroys what may have taken years to grow and develop. This often creates different conditions that call for something fresh and adaptive to fill the void. A new species might emerge. A new skill set might develop. A radically different approach may appear. A totally new opportunity opens up. This is creative destruction. This is evolution. This is life.

This cycle of change may vary it's timing, but it never changes. Heraclitus was a philosopher living in ancient Greece around 500 BC. His greatest legacy today is his doctrine that perpetual change is central to the universe. Pre-dating and influencing Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle, Heraclitus made a series of observations on the unchanging nature of change that are highly relevant for us to keep in mind today:

"Nothing endures but change."

"You could not step twice into the same river; for other waters are ever flowing on to you."

"All is flux, nothing stays still."

"There is nothing permanent except change."

If you have a perspective to add to this conversation, please post your comments at <http://www.jimclemmer.com/blog/?p=739>.

WINDS OF CHANGE: LIFE BLOWS ON

A positive outcome of these turbulent times is that it's reminding us to never get too attached to our jobs, "stuff" we've accumulated, or the circumstances of our lives. It's all here today and gone tomorrow. I've been studying the ancient wisdom of Buddhist philosophy for many years. A key teaching is accepting life's impermanence and practicing detachment.

In my new book *Growing @ the Speed of Change*, I wrote the following vignette:

Julia was exhausted. Business was outstanding. Their team was scrambling to keep up and she was stretched thin. They had trouble finding enough good people to fill the new positions that were being created by the company's rapid growth.

During a family gathering she talked about her crazy-busy life and shared her frustration with a favorite uncle who was semi-retired from decades of building successful businesses. Uncle Vern had become a mentor and great sounding board for Julia. He smiled knowingly as she outlined her growth problems at work. As they talked Uncle

Vern gave Julia nuggets of sage advice and his years of accumulated wisdom. The comment that she puzzled over most during the following weeks was "This too will pass."

Julia was exhausted. Revenues had plunged off a cliff. In a few short months their high-growth market sharply reversed direction at a dizzying rate. Their company was scrambling to cut costs and began laying people off. She was stretched thin trying to cover vacant positions on her team. All the while Julia grew increasingly insecure about her own job.

During another family gathering Julia anxiously sought out Uncle Vern's advice. He told her of similar market downturns he'd lived through and the sleepless nights he'd experienced as his life work and life savings hung in the balance. She took comfort in much of his wise counsel on the way home that evening. The comment that stayed with her over the coming weeks was "This too will pass."

THOUGHTS THAT MAKE YOU GO HMMMM...ON EXPERT FORECASTS

In times of uncertainty and upheaval – like we're now experiencing – we turn to "experts" to tell us what's going on and what we can expect. Don't believe a word of what they are uttering. Numerous studies show that expert predictions are wrong. The great British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who led England during the Second World War, wryly reflected on his frustration in getting "expert" advice: "It's the ability to foretell what will happen tomorrow, next month and next year – and to explain afterwards why it did not happen."

I keep an extensive database of failed predictions. Here are a few favorites:

"I have traveled the length and breadth of this country and talked with the best people, and I can assure you that data processing is a fad that won't last out the year."
- The editor in charge of business books for Prentice Hall in 1957

"Stock prices have reached what looks like a permanently high plateau."
- Irving Fisher, Professor of Economics at Yale University, a few days before the stock market crash in October of 1929

"X-rays will prove to be a hoax.... No balloon and no aero plane will ever be practically successful... There is nothing new to be discovered in physics now. All that remains is more and more precise measurement."
- William Thomson, 1st Baron Kelvin (or Lord Kelvin), late 19th century British mathematical physicist and engineer

"So many centuries after the Creation it is unlikely that anyone could find hitherto unknown lands of any value."

- 1486 committee advising King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain regarding a proposal by Christopher Columbus, six years before he discovered the Americas

"There is not the slightest indication that nuclear energy will ever be obtainable. It would mean that the atom would have to be shattered at will."

- Albert Einstein, early 20th century Nobel Prize winning theoretical physicist

"The (Atomic) bomb will never go off, and I speak as an expert in explosives."

- Fleet Admiral William Daniel Leahy to President Truman in 1944

John Kenneth Galbraith, Canadian-American economist, Harvard professor, advisor to U.S. presidents, and author of over four dozen books and one thousand papers summed it up well, "There are two classes of people who tell what is going to happen in the future: Those who don't know, and those who don't know they don't know."

THE LEADER LETTER SURVEY

The Leader Letter survey is still open. If you have a few minutes, I'd really appreciate your feedback.

One of the discussions I often have with my Marketing Director, Aidan Crawford, is about the length of the newsletter, given the time crunch and massive amounts of e-mail we all receive each day. I sometimes think it's too long. But then when I do these surveys most respondents tell me that it's "just right." You can see the results of the survey so far at: [Survey Results](#).

But I still get that nagging feeling that it's a little long. That's why I've provided options for everyone to access the same great content, in different forms. Obviously, if you're reading this, you've subscribed to the newsletter. You have an option to read it in your e-mail, download the PDF, or click on a link and read *The Leader Letter* online.

For those of you, who'd like the same great content in smaller chunks, you can always subscribe to my [blog \(as an e-mail\)](#) or [RSS feed](#) and get the same articles e-mailed out to you over the course of the month.

And of course, if you'd like to keep up-to-date in 140 characters or less, you can even follow me on Twitter at www.twitter.com/JimClemmer.

STRONG LEADERSHIP MEANS USING PERSUASION MORE THAN POSITION POWER

www.connectitnews.com has been posting a series of my articles on their site. Recently they ran this one:

[Many Managers Disempower Themselves](#)

Many managers unwittingly believe that leadership only comes down from the top. They give away their power by believing that they don't have any.

After reading this article, Herb Knudsen shared his insights with me:

"I totally agree with your premise about managers disempowering themselves.

I served in a high power/low authority position at Standard Oil of Ohio in the early 1980's. I never demanded. I developed eminently reasonable proposals, circulated them to as many people as possible who had an interest and an opinion that would be important to the manager with authority.

I always asked each person or group for comments, changes and improvements to the proposal. After the proposal had the support of everyone, I took it to the manager with authority and asked for his comments, changes, improvements and approval. My success rate was very high. Networking rather than demands could be a superior recommendation.

Best regards,"

Herbert D. Knudsen, President
Ogallala Comfort Company
www.ogallalacomfortcompany.com
www.ogallalaescapes.com

Herb's examples illustrate that leadership is an action, not a position. He also provides a good example of the type of upward leadership we see with highly effective people – regardless of their role or position. You can find more articles on Serving, Influencing, and Leading Upward at http://www.jimclemmer.com/serving_influencing_and_leading_upward_title/serving_influencing_and_leading_upward.php. One of the articles in this section ("[Assessing Our Ability to Influence Others](#)") features our Influence Index assessment. You can read about it in this article and complete the assessment at http://www.jimclemmer.com/quizzes/the_influence_index_14.php.

DON'T LET TOXIC PEOPLE CORRODE PERFORMANCE AND DESTROY YOUR TEAM

The April 2009 issue of *Harvard Business Review* has a short item entitled "How Toxic Colleagues Corrode Performance." The authors polled several thousand managers and employees from a range of American companies. Here's what they found is the impact of negative and rude behavior in the workplace:

- 48% decreased their work effort
- 47% decreased their time at work
- 38% decreased their work quality
- 66% said their performance declined
- 80% lost work time worrying about the incident
- 63% lost time avoiding the offender, and
- 78% said their commitment to the organization declined.

That's pretty powerful evidence of the need to deal with the "bad apples" who are pulling others down! I am finding in my workshops that slipping levels of engagement and morale in many organizations makes dealing with toxic people especially critical today.

I've been dealing with this problem for many years in my work. If you're looking for tips and techniques to deal with this growing issue, here are a few of my existing resources:

- The [March 2004](#) issue of *The Leader Letter* is focused on this topic. In "A Reader's Top Ten Survival Tips for Victimitis," Terri Waterman provides useful advice.
- Navigating Change and Adversity at <http://jimclemmer.blogspot.com/2007/03/navigating-change-and-adversity.html>. A few of my thoughts on how we respond to life's storm – whether as Navigators, Survivors, or Victims – as the core determinant of our success and happiness in all elements of our lives. I outline a popular model I use around this concept and provide a video clip of me presenting this model to a large audience.
- Peruse a series of my articles on Attitude and Outlook at http://www.jimclemmer.com/attitude_and_outlook_title/attitude_and_outlook.php
- More recent blog posts on Attitude and Outlook at <http://www.jimclemmer.com/newsletter/?cat=21>.

DATA SANITY PULLS TOGETHER QUALITY IMPROVEMENT TOOLS, LEADERSHIP, AND CULTURE

If you're confused by the alphabet soup of quality fads over the last twenty years: Quality Assurance (QA), Total Quality Management (TQM), Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI), Quality Function Deployment (QFD), Statistical Process Control (SPC) coupled with Baldrige criteria, Reengineering, Balanced Scorecards, and, currently, Six Sigma... and LEAN Six Sigma... and TOYOTA Lean Six Sigma then you need to get a copy of [Davis Balestracci's](#) new book, [Data Sanity: A Quantum Leap to Unprecedented Results](#). [Davis](#) has written a highly useful and very rare book. Highly useful in the way it's jammed full of practical tips, tools, and techniques drawn from his extensive study, hands-on applications, and global experience. *Data Sanity* is very rare because it balances the analytical elements of improvement tools with the key catalysts of leadership and culture change. This extensive guide book can be a handbook for revolutionary breakthrough.

Davis and I first met in 1995 when he attended a workshop I presented at an [Institute for Healthcare Improvement](#) conference in San Diego. He was then using my second book, [Firing on All Cylinders: The Service/Quality System for High-Powered Corporate Performance](#) with his current organization to help in their quality improvement efforts. Since that workshop, we've stayed in touch with each other's work as Davis moved out on his own as an independent consultant to provide his depth of research, experience, and leadership insights to many other organizations.

Davis has been a frequent contributor to [The Leader Letter](#) in the past few years. I love the passion and broad perspective he brings to pulling together statistical methods, process management, measurement, and survey methodologies with leadership and culture. After years of extensive effort, his new work is a comprehensive resource book synthesizing so much of what's needed to drive dramatic organization improvement. Focused especially on healthcare management, its lessons, advice, and experiences are very applicable to most other industries.

Visit his web site at <http://www.dbharmony.com> to see how his approaches are designed to “think with both sides of the brain.” We’re right in step with each other on this. I’ve long found that [The High-Performance Balance](#) is critical to the success of any organization improvement efforts.

COURAGEOUS SAFETY LEADERSHIP IN TURBULENT TIMES: THE ECONOMIC MOMENT OF TRUTH FOR SAFETY COMMITMENT

We’ve been working with Don Ritz, (VP Safety and Health), Bruce Huber (Director, Safety and Health), and their highly dedicated team at Barrick Gold for the past five years. It’s been a real treat because everyone is so deeply committed to building a much safer company in an industry with a bad safety record. During the past few years they’ve seen a 75% reduction in safety incidents!!

Don is a very articulate and effective presenter. He and I have jointly presented our work on “Courageous Leadership for Health and Safety” at conferences in Vancouver, Reno, Santiago, and internal workshops. The best definition I have ever heard of “persuasion” is “logic on fire.” Don’s an incredibly persuasive guy. He reaches your heart with powerful stories, examples, and metaphors – emotional intelligence in action. Woven into those leadership messages is rock-solid data and management logic.

Don has just sent me a couple of his latest articles. Here’s the description of an especially timely and powerful one entitled “Courageous Safety Leadership in Turbulent Times: The Economic Moment of Truth for Safety Commitment”

“Smart leaders focus on safety even in tough times. Businesses that retreat into survival mode and ignore safety do so at their peril, risking loss of employee and stakeholder confidence and exposing themselves to financial and reputational loss they can ill afford. It’s a moment of truth when employees and stakeholders learn whether safety is truly your priority or just a convenient cliché for good times. Visionary leaders who build safety culture even in a downturn maintain people’s trust, prevent loss, and position the organization for enhanced success as times improve. Safety is the right business focus in good times and bad.”

[Click here to read the rest of the article.](#)

Don also has two additional articles that are available to download:

[Accidents – Is Zero Possible? \(PDF\)](#)

[Walking the Talk on Courageous Safety Leadership \(PDF\)](#)

I’ve written about and showed some of Barrick’s approaches in past issues of [The Leader Letter](#):

- Practical Role Modeling: Barrick Gold Provides Specific Guidelines
<http://www.jimclemmer.com/news1/july2006.html>

- Courageous Leadership for Health and Safety
<http://www.jimclemmer.com/news1/dec2006.html>

FROM CASUAL TO MODERATE TO INTENSE LEVELS OF SERVICE

A workshop attendee recently visited our web site article library and read "[Casual, Moderate, and Intense Levels of Customer/Partner Focus](#)." She sent me an e-mail asking for further insights to the intense level of service I highlighted in that chart. She also wanted ideas on how to accomplish this on a smaller scale within a larger organization.

I suggested that she browse through my other customer service articles at

http://www.jimclemmer.com/customer_service_title/customer_service.php. The article "[Three Basic Steps to Focus on Customers and Partners](#)" does give more depth on intensely improving customer service. Her question about changing the big system and building partnerships is addressed in some of my articles on [Serving, Influencing, and Leading Upward](#). My 1992 book, [Firing on All Cylinders: The Service/Quality System for High-Powered Corporate Performance](#), provides an extensive framework for improving service/quality levels.

But most of this material is aimed at external customer service. Increasingly I am working with internal support groups like HR, IT, or Admin and Finance to increase internal service levels. I am looking for examples of ways to increase internal support. Please post any of your experiences or advice on this issue at <http://www.jimclemmer.com/blog/?p=735>.

MOST POPULAR MAY IMPROVEMENT POINTS

[Improvement Points](#) is a no-charge service to bring timely and inspirational quotes from my articles to subscribers three times a week. Built around our new [topic index](#), Improvement Points are crafted to help you become a better leader of yourself, your team and your organization. Each Improvement Point links directly to a full article on our web site. If you'd like to read more about the point being made in that day's Improvement Point, you simply click on the "Read the full article now" link below each IP. Many subscribers circulate especially relevant [Improvement Points](#) articles to their team, Clients, or colleagues for further discussion or action.

Here are the three most popular Improvement Points we sent out in May:

"Leaders look beyond the current situation - beyond what is to what could be. That's why leadership is all about change. It's why leadership is action, not a position."

- from Jim Clemmer's article, "Steering Our Leadership Wheel"
[Read the full article now!](#)

"Taking an organization from good to great customer service ultimately depends on the people who provide that service. It can only happen through the volunteerism - the willingness to go beyond what is merely required - of people who serve on the front lines. Going from ordinary to extraordinary performance

happens through the discretionary efforts of frontline staff deciding to make the thousands of "moment(s) of truth" (any time a customer interacts with the company in person, by phone, or electronically), they manage every day as positively as they possibly can. This enthusiasm, loyalty, or devotion can't be forced on people. It only happens through a "culture of commitment," where frontline people reflect to the outside the intense pride and ownership they are experiencing on the inside."

- from Jim Clemmer's article, "Customer Satisfaction is a Reflection of Employee Satisfaction"
[Read the full article now!](#)

"Accepting responsibility for our choices is not only tough, in today's society it can even be considered weird. It's much easier to blame somebody or something else. But the happiest and most successful people who get things done and get on with their lives - leaders - know that life is an endless series of choices. They may be victimized, but refuse to be a victim. They may visit Pity City occasionally, but don't make it their permanent home."

- from Jim Clemmer's article, "Leaders Make It Happen"
[Read the full article now!](#)

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 e-mail at Jim.Clemmer@Clemmer.net.

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

Jim

The CLEMMER Group

10 Pioneer Drive, Suite 105,
Kitchener, ON N2P 2A4
Phone: (519) 748-1044
Fax: (519) 748-5813

E-mail: service@clemmer.net
<http://www.jimclemmer.com>

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The CLEMMER Group
10 Pioneer Drive, Suite 105, Kitchener ON N2P 2A4
Phone: (519) 748-1044 ~ Fax: (519) 748-5813
E-mail: service@clemmer.net
<http://www.jimclemmer.com>