



Practical Leadership:

Inspiring Action, Achieving Results

Jim Clemmer's Leader Letter

October 2004, Issue 19

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Moose Still on the Loose

I continue to use the analogy of "Moose-on-the-Table" with many management teams to get at issues that are blocking their progress but aren't being discussed (click here for an excerpt from *The Leader's Digest* explaining this concept: www.clemmer.net/excerpts/authentic_comm.shtml).

I was working with the head of a small professional services organization where prior to the retreat, her autocratic style was identified as a big Moose hindering the team. During our offsite retreat this Moose was joined by equally large siblings in a Moose-on-the-Table exercise showing that professional staff was very inhibited by feelings of very low trust, respect, and openness within the organization. When faced with this type of feedback, too many leaders discount, rationalize and (consistent with the problem) try to command the Moose to go away (often by expressing extreme annoyance with people who point to the Moose). Of course, it doesn't. It just starts hiding under the table and lurking in the hallways as part of whispered conversations.

I encouraged the leader to use the Moose feedback (and work that will emerge from a teamwork and communication initiative they launched as result of the retreat) as the key opportunity to reduce the "We/They Gaps" between the leadership team, professional staff, and administrative support staff. I pointed out to her that this is a great chance to examine the leadership team processes around meetings, planning/review/follow-through, Staff Forum, and decision-making. I suggested she might find the following articles on our web site useful:

www.clemmer.net/excerpts/leadership_keys.shtml

www.clemmer.net/excerpts/pp_teams.shtml

www.clemmer.net/excerpts/empower_word.shtml

One of the major problems within this organization is that the biggest Moose was sitting in the chair at the head of the leadership table. Her style and approach shut down debates and discussions and created unhealthy jockeying and politics among the team. This rippled out in the organization through turf battles, disrespect, and blaming.

I tried to coach her toward getting feedback on her leadership and working to shift her style. Unfortunately, she would not look in the mirror. As far as she was concerned, the problem was with everyone else's leadership. The rift between her, her team, and the rest of the organization grew ever bigger and the organization's results steadily declined. She is no longer there today.

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Moose Hunting: Ways to Reduce or Eliminate Moose**Selected from the new *Leader's Digest: Practical Application Planner***

- Brainstorm potential Moose issues by asking for ideas on the "dumbest things we do around here," "biggest barriers to reaching our goals," "major implementation issues we need to address," "pet peeves," "dumb rules and forms," "things that drive you crazy," or the like. List each point. Cluster the similar points until you have 5 - 7 major groupings or clusters. Identify those things you or your team directly control, can influence, and don't control at all. Prioritize the things you control and get ideas/volunteers/plans to address them. Do the same for things you can influence. Discuss how you can all accept and let go of the things you can't do anything about.
- The worst thing you can do is ask for input to identify Moose issues and then not deal openly and effectively with them. You're better off to not ask if you aren't going to follow-through. Follow-up to see if team members feel you have done all you can to address it.
- Potential ways to play with the Moose-on-the-Table approach:
 - Give everyone on your team a little toy stuffed Moose.
 - Hold a Moose hunting retreat/meeting and give everyone Moose hunting T-shirts.
 - Get team members at a meeting to write down and hand in a few of the biggest Moose they feel are present. Cluster the similar issues and hold a secret ballot vote on the top clusters.
 - If you suspect people aren't being open during a discussion, ask, "Is there a Moose-on-the-Table we need to talk about?"
 - Get a consultant/facilitator outside of your team to run focus groups, conduct confidential interviews, or do a survey of your team to identify and prioritize Moose issues.
 - As a meeting participant, you might frame an issue with, "I'd like to put a little Moose-on-the-Table..."

**Thoughts That Make You Go Hmmm...
On Moose-on-the-Table Issues**

"I sat at a table where rich food and wine were in abundance, and obsequious attendance, but sincerity and truth were not; and I went away hungry from the inhospitable board."

- Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

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"One of the greatest challenges a leader faces at the height of his or her career is not simply allowing people to speak the truth but actually being able to hear it."

- Warren Bennis

"The best servants of the people, like the best valets, must whisper unpleasant truths in the master's ear. It is the court fool, not the foolish courtier, whom the king can least afford to lose."

- Walter Lippman

"All too often, behind failed products, broken processes, and mistaken decisions are people who chose to hold their tongues rather than to speak up. Breaking the silence can bring an outpouring of fresh ideas from all levels of an organization - ideas that just might raise the organization's performance to a whole new level."

- Leslie Perlow and Stephanie Williams, "Is Silence Killing Your Company?" *Harvard Business Review*, May 2003

"Dr. Paul Brand was for many years a missionary doctor in India working among lepers. His greatest risk was contracting the disease himself and suffering the progressive deadening of his nerves. He had a practice of taking a scalding hot bath once a week. As he felt the pain in all of his extremities, he knew that he had not contracted the dreadful disease. To him, pain meant life. The pain of honestly facing mistakes means life for the firm."

- C. William Pollard, *The Soul of the Firm*

More on Traveling With the Wind in Our Hair

Following is another reader's story on the importance of taking the time to reflect, rejuvenate and notice the simplest of pleasures:

Hi Jim,

I somehow missed your wonderful story in the [August letter](#) as I was speed-reading my way through e-mails but just now took the time to find and read your article. Both your original story and [another reader's anecdote](#) struck a very common note.

My parents have a wonderful cottage on a lake where the only access is via boat. Some years ago as my folks were starting to fail they bought a 20-foot pontoon boat (a party boat). It revolutionized opening and closing the cottage and just daily existence. It has a full canopy and curtains and one can sit inside, protected from the world. It also sports a 60 horsepower engine, which on a party boat is quite a motor (my nickname on the lake is the "flying boat"). For four years, I have been shuttling my daughter, hauling old people and groceries and cruising on particularly lovely summer nights watching the sun go down. All

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from inside the boat, under the protection of the curtains, with the throttle at full tilt. My daughter enjoys the front seats and fresh air and wind in her hair. I find the curtains too time consuming and hard to take off and put back on.

This past Labor Day Sunday, it was time for the boat to come out of the water. Neighbors called and offered to pick us up from the marina in their party boat. The curtains were off and the boat was completely stripped, ready for storage. As we started away from the dock, I noticed how freely my daughter's hair blew in the wind, how the sun shone on her gorgeous head. I noticed the feel of the wind in my hair and the smell of the water. It was a rebirth and I wondered what I had been doing for the past four years.

Our neighbors picked us up and as we left the channel, the husband commented to his wife, "Bet she's seeing cottages she didn't know were there!" I turned to him and exclaimed that I was at that very moment in the midst of a very large "AH HA" and realized that I sped everywhere from under protection and had missed a great deal of living. There was in that instance a rebirth! And I announced that come spring when the boat was back in the water it was going to be "topless" all the way - at a snail's pace to boot! We enjoyed a lovely last cruise under one of the sunniest days of the season.

It's funny how so many individuals are having that momentary lapse of sanity isn't it!

Katie

Change Lessons from Hermit Crabs

One of the rewards of being in my line of business is that I get to meet a wide variety of very interesting people doing this type of work. I met Donald Cooper five years ago and he's become a very good friend. Besides being a funny and fascinating guy with lots of stories to tell (his family owned Coopers, the famous Canadian sporting equipment company), Donald is an outstanding speaker and seminar leader on marketing, service, and business excellence (his web site is www.donaldcooper.com).

After a trip to Atlantic Canada and Prince Edward Island, Donald included this passage in an e-mail to me:

We saw hundreds of hermit crabs that have no shell of their own so they 'occupy' the empty shell of some other critter. They walk around with this borrowed shell on their back and when danger threatens, they retreat inside the shell. As they grow, they outgrow their adopted home and rather than be limited by their immediate surrounding, they cheerfully (I'm just supposing about the 'cheerfully' part) go in search of a larger shell. There's got to be two or three life and business lessons that we can learn from this - like knowing when it's time to move on because you've outgrown where you are.

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Donald is so good at keeping his eyes open and finding leadership analogies in daily life. Hermit crabs are a good metaphor for growth and adaptability. We all need to figure out how to protect ourselves while continuing to grow.

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:

"Both management and leadership are needed to make teams and organizations successful. Trying to decide which is more important is like trying to decide whether the right or left wing is more important to an airplane's flight. I'll take both please!"

- from **Management vs. Leadership**

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

"Regardless of where they might be in the organizational hierarchy, strong leaders don't make the mistake of behaving as though they work for someone else. You won't find them saying, 'They ought to do something about that.' Instead, they'll say, 'I will do something about that.'"

- from **Many Managers Disempower Themselves**

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

"Don't wait – initiate! That's the deeply embedded belief system of strong leaders. An ancient Chinese proverb teaches that 'the person for waits for a roast duck to fly into their mouth must wait a very long time.'"

- from **Just Go and Do It**

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

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

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Rare Public Upcoming Workshops in Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia

If your organization has been striving to improve customer service levels but not quite pulling it together, you may want to attend my two-day [Leading a Customer-Centered Organization](#) workshop in Vancouver or Mississauga. I have distilled 20 years of research, experiences, best practices, and leadership/personal development into this intensive session. Check it out at www.clemmer.net/events/dcco/dcco.shtml.

Vancouver, BC - January 11-12, 2005**Mississauga, ON - February 7-8, 2005**

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 how to strengthen their leadership and how to help their team/organization successfully navigate change. Join me in Calgary or Kitchener for two intensive days at my [Leading @ the Speed of Change](#) workshop. Check it out at www.clemmer.net/events/lsc/lsc.shtml.

Calgary, AB - January 13-14, 2005**Kitchener, ON - May 31 - June 1, 2005****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. 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.

I hope to connect with you again next month!

Jim

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