Issue 160 - July 2016

The Leader Letter

Last month I participated in the 3rd Canadian Conference on Positive Psychology in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario. Having attended the first Canadian conference at the University of Toronto in 2012, and avidly following all the research, articles, and books in this burgeoning new field I found the conference lived up to their theme "Exhilarate 2016 - Learn It, Live It."

Strengths-based development is the foundation of positive psychology. So I thoroughly enjoyed leading a workshop sharing our last four years of our experience with *The Extraordinary Leader*, Zenger Folkman's strengths-based assessment and development process, as outlined in my webinar on *Ground Breaking New Approaches to Leadership and Coaching Development*.

David Cooperrider delivered a very inspiring and insightful conference keynote presentation on "The Discovery and Design of Positive Institutions." David is a professor, researcher, and author who co-created Appreciative Inquiry (AI). Having read some of his books and articles I was fascinated to hear updates on AI's contributions to a global revolution in the positive leadership of change. David showed how AI is helping institutions around the world discover the power of strengths-based approaches.

David's written that "the emergence of strengths-based management may be the management innovation of our time… the insight that a person or organization will excel only by amplifying strengths, never by simply fixing weaknesses. But in spite of impressive returns, organizations and managers have almost all stopped short of the breakthroughs that are possible."

A key theme of David's presentation centered on the transformative role business is playing in evaluating society. He told us Stanford University's Willis Harman was an early mentor for him with such insights as "Business, the motor of our society, has the opportunity to be the new creative force on the planet, a force which could contribute to the well-being of many… the modern corporation is as adaptable an organizational form as has ever been invented, so that in a time of fundamental change it may be expected to be on the cutting edge."

Positive and powerful organizations result from strong leadership teams. As you'll read in this issue, highly effective leadership teams step back periodically to sharpen their strategic focus, establish strong learning environments, vision their team or culture, follow proven steps to high teamwork, and foster courageous conversations that reduce the moose.

May you find positive insights, examples, or ideas to strengthen your effectiveness!

Does Your Leadership Team Need Strategic Focus?

Summer is a great time for some much needed R & R. In our hectic 24/7, crazy busy world it's even more vital we carve out time for recharging and rejuvenating.

Leadership teams also need time away from daily operations and everyday distractions to work together in planning and strategy, reflection and renewal, team building, and development planning. As you reflect on the blur of the first six months of 2016, this is also the right time to look ahead to the fall in finishing this year and getting ready for 2017.

Fall is a popular time for leadership team retreats. This time away provides space for the collaboration and planning so vital to increasing safety, service/quality improvement, leadership, or culture development.

Failing to work "on" your team, not just "in" your team can contribute to these common communication breakdowns that often derail teams:

- The team isn't united in strategic priorities
- Conflicting messages ripple out to the organization
- Behaviors don't model the desired culture or values
- Little personal feedback on leadership behaviors
- It's not safe to discuss moose-on-the-table (touchy or politically sensitive topics)

"**Clear leadership team retreat objectives and outcomes are vital to success**". Here's a summary of some common retreat objectives:

- leadership/culture development
- team building
- leveraging leadership strengths
- improving customer focus
- revitalizing vision, values, purpose
- conflict resolution
- increasing communication and teamwork
- creating a coaching culture
- building a consensus/engagement and implementation plan for organizational change and development
- enhancing safety
- strategic approach to succession planning and talent/performance management

Taking time to sharpen the woodcutters ax is a story that's become a cliché because it gets at a profound paradox. The busier we get the more we feel like we can't afford taking time out for learning, development, or retreats. But we actually become more productive by taking time out, stepping back, and sharpening our tools and approaches.

As you think about team reflection and renewal this summer, you might find my webinar on *Executive Team Building and Culture Development* useful. You might also want to ponder a few possible ways to configure your session at **Leadership Team Retreats**.

May your summer resonate with the words of American writer, Henry James, "summer afternoon, summer afternoon; to me those have always been the two most beautiful words in the English language."
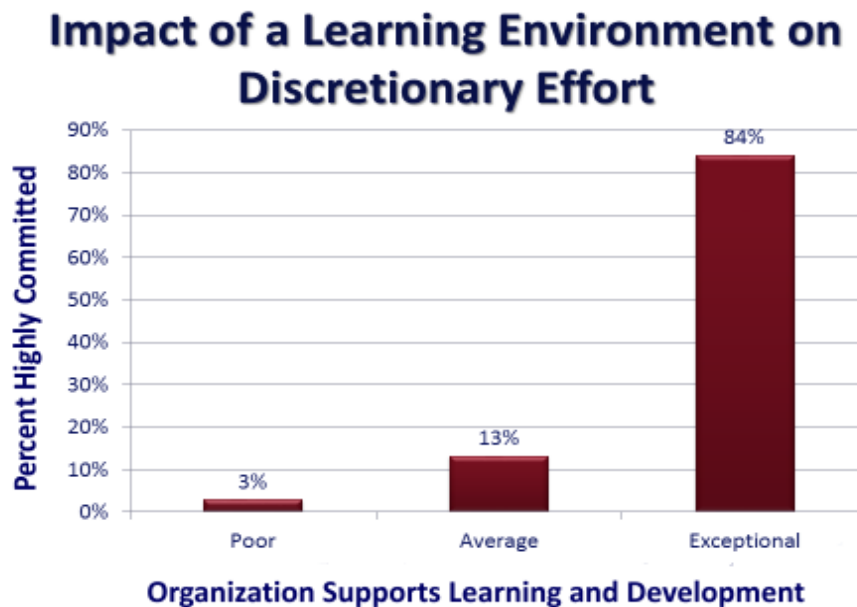
The Powerful Impact of a Learning Environment on Discretionary Effort

Decades ago, in a *Harvard Business Review* article, "How I Learned to Let My Workers Lead," the founder and CEO of a food company made this connection between learning and agility, "Learning is change, and I keep learning and relearning that change is and needs to be continuous... change is the real job of every effective business leader because change is about the present and the future, not about the past. There is no end to change." This belief drove the CEO to build "a company that never stops learning... learning, striving people are happy people and good workers. They have initiative and imagination, and the companies they work for are rarely caught napping." Ralph Stayer retired in 2015 having built Johnsville Foods from nothing to over one billion in sales.

Agility is becoming a major focus for many organizations today. For good reason. Our pace of change is accelerating through a relentless demand for better, faster, **and** cheaper. Merriam-Webster defines agility as "marked by ready ability to move with quick easy grace" and "having a quick, resourceful and adaptable character."

A Zenger Folkman study showed how a very strong learning organization impacts commitment levels:

Impact of a Learning Environment on Discretionary Effort

Percent Highly Committed — Organization Supports Learning and Development: Poor 3%, Average 13%, Exceptional 84%

Stretching, growing, and learning is invigorating. When we're stimulated and challenged we're energized and engaged. Work is transformed from a job to a joy. In an agile, learning organization problems are resolved quickly. And then they're used as opportunities for continuous improvement. Openness, transparency, and collaboration means decisions are made quickly with high buy-in and ownership for implementation. Leaders make tough calls and communicate why. "Fast failure" with lots of pilots and experiments help everyone learn what works best. Data and feedback shifts leadership behaviors and guides continuous process improvements.

Learning and adaptability lead to much higher discretionary effort. This creates highly engaged and agile organizations moving at or ahead of the speed of change. How's your team or organization doing? How do you **know?** Where's your measurement data?

Thoughts That Make You Go Hmmm on... Agile, Learning Organizations

"The learning organization can mean two things, it can mean an organization which learns and/or an organization which encourages learning in its people. It should mean both."

- Charles Handy, *"The Age of Unreason"*, Harvard Business School Press, Boston, pp 225

"Feedback is the lifeblood of the organization -- the exchange of information that lets people know if the job they are doing is going well or needs to be fine-tuned, upgraded, or redirected entirely.

- Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*

"Visionary companies make some of their best moves by experimentation, trial and error, opportunism, and -- quite literally -- accident. What looks in retrospect like brilliant foresight and preplanning was often the result of "Let's just try a lot of stuff and keep what works. In this sense, visionary companies mimic the biological evolution of species."

- James C. Collins and Jerry Porras, *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*

"Management must also enable the enterprise and each of its members to grow and develop as needs and opportunities change. Every enterprise is a learning and teaching institution. Training and development must be built into it on all levels -- training and development that never stop."

- Peter Drucker, *The Essential Drucker*

"…the three building blocks of a learning organization. The first, a supportive learning environment, comprises psychological safety, appreciation of differences, openness to new ideas, and time for reflection. The second, concrete learning processes and practices, includes experimentation, information collection and analysis, and education and training. These two complementary elements are fortified by the final building block: leadership that reinforces learning.

- David A. Garvin, Amy C. Edmondson, and Francesca Gino, "Is Yours a Learning Organization?" *Harvard Business Review*

"Learning is an economic elixir. It makes both people and organizations more adaptable, more able to respond to change, more nimble. It serves as the bedrock for innovation; it is impossible to innovate without learning something new. And when it occurs in workplaces, it is one of those rarest of opportunities -- where employers' and employees' incentives are in perfect harmony. In the vast majority of cases, it makes both better off."

- Laurie Bassi, Ed Frauenheim, Lawrence Costello, and Dan McNurrer, with Larry Costello, *Good Company: Business Success in the Worthiness Era*

"First, study projects that didn't pan out and document all the insights they offer about customers, markets, future trends, your organization, your operations, your team, and yourself. Second, magnify the impact of those lessons by spreading them across your company. Senior leaders should gather frequently to discuss their failures, and efforts to share lessons with all employees will build trust and goodwill and encourage future initiatives.

Third, step back and do a corporate wide review of your pattern of failure, to ensure your overall approach is yielding all the benefits it should."

- Julian Birkinshaw and Martine Haas, "Increase Your Return on Failure," *Harvard Business Review*

Webinar: 9 Ways to Build Effective Relationships

"No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main." These are a few lines of a poem penned by the metaphysical English poet, John Donne, around the time of Shakespeare. Community, interdependence, and oneness has been a central part of many ancient philosophies and spiritual practices for thousands of years.

This is especially true in today's networked, globalized world, and interconnected workplaces. It's nearly impossible for anyone in today's organizations to succeed totally on his or her own. Some degree of teamwork and collaboration are vital to getting almost anything done. And that means building strong relationships.

As our organizations continue to rapidly transform and change, relationship building is also shifting. What once worked in a traditional hierarchy is quite different from what's needed now to make a flat, network, team-based organization work well.

In the new organization of today -- with its greater emphasis on teams and better information dissemination -- the nature of relationships has changed. It is now important to develop relationships that elicit cooperation and encourage people to take initiative and act more independently.

A key to effective leadership is the ability to build positive relationships with other people. We know that these relationships improve retention, engagement, and discretionary effort but there is a much deeper meaning and importance.

Last month Jack Zenger and Joe Folkman presented a 40 minute complimentary webinar on **How to Build Effective Relationships -- 9 Ways to Work with Others in a Positive Way**. View the archived webinar to hear Joe and Jack discuss:

- Nine key ways to build effective relationships and work with others in a positive way.
- The nature of relationships in today's flat, team-based organizations.
- Developing relationships that encourage people to take initiative and act more independently.

Click here to view the archived webinar.

8 Vital Steps for Executive Teamwork and Organization Development

We'd just finished facilitating a two-day offsite retreat with an international resources company when I came back to my office to find the June issue of *Harvard Business Review* with a feature article on "The Secrets of Great Teamwork." The authors -- two management and organization behavior professors at Wharton and INSEAD -- were reporting on their 15 years of research involving 300 interviews and 4,200 surveys of team leaders and managers.

Martine Haas and Mark Mortensen find that "teams are more diverse, dispersed, digital, and dynamic than ever before. These qualities make collaboration especially challenging." Their research shows four enabling conditions create the most effective teams:

- Compelling direction
- Strong structure
- Supportive context
- Shared mindset

Our highly productive retreat exceeded participant's objectives. Many executives -- who'd been through numerous planning sessions and retreats before -- deemed this one the best they'd ever experienced.

After reading the teamwork article and then editing and finalizing the extensive set of flipchart notes and plans we'd generated at the retreat, I reflected on the key elements that led to such a successful session and how these overlapped with Haas and Mortensen's findings:

- **Starting with foundational models/frameworks**
- **Visioning the ideal culture**
- **Clarifying and agreeing on four core values**
- **Identifying leadership behaviors/actions** that most clearly live each of the core values
- An anonymous/safe process to name the biggest **moose-on-the-table** (or elephant-in-the-room) that need to be addressed
- Prioritizing the "moose issues" and having **"courageous conversations"** to deal with them
- Establishing three **Strategic Imperatives** to move all this idealizing and planning from vision to execution
- Setting up **implementation teams and process** with timeframes and follow up dates

Option #1 at **Leadership Team Retreats** describes this methodology a bit further. My recent webinar on *Executive Team Building and Culture Development* provides a deeper look at these approaches.

As Haas and Mortensen conclude, "teamwork has never been easy -- but in recent years
it has become much more complex. And the trends that make it more difficult seem likely to continue, as teams become increasingly global, virtual, and project-driven."

How to Vision Your Ideal Team or Culture

As outlined in my blog, step two of "**8 Vital Steps for Executive Teamwork and Organization Development**" is visioning your ideal culture (or team). For years I've used variations of this critical step for team building, culture development, conflict resolution, strategic planning, etc, at **Leadership Team Retreats**.

Many leaders confuse goal setting and visioning. The pioneering French psychologist, Émile Coué, broadly framed the difference when he wrote, "Imagery may be the highest form of mental energy we have. Reason can analyze and organize, but only imagination can create. It is through imagination that we create the future -- ours and the worlds."

We first start imagery or visioning exercises with a look at this contrast and balance from *The Leader's Digest*:

Management Goals and Leadership Vision

Goals	Vision
• Appeal to our intellect	• Engages our emotions
• Results and timeframes	• A desired future state
• Builds a business case	• Kindles a cause
• Rational	• Intuitive
• Pushes performance	• Inspires and aligns
• Targets and objectives	• Images and feelings
• Solves problems	• Imagines possibilities
• Logical progression	• Irrational "skyhooks"
• Written	• Verbal

Here's the process I often use when working with a team of more than six leaders:

1. Individual participants silently make notes on the ideal culture and leadership behaviors he or she envisions for their team/organization.
2. In small groups (no more than 7 people), hear each group member's vision -- no discussion/debating.
3. Once you've heard everyone's vision, the recorder captures the most striking images/examples and/or summarizes key vision themes (needs to be more descriptive than generalities or single words like "teamwork" or "trust").
4. Hand in your group's top (one Post-It-Note per image/example) snapshots.

We then cluster the Post-It-Notes and put headings on each grouping.

This approach pulls together and synthesizes everyone's vision. Hundreds of times I've seen the magnetizing and energizing effect it has on aligning a team or board and getting everyone pointed in the same direction. Try it with your team and experience its inspiring and galvanizing impact.

Steps to Fostering Courageous Conversations to Reduce the Moose

Last month I facilitated a couple of variations of **leadership team retreats** featuring "moose hunting" exercises. Whether they're called elephants-in-the-room, 800 pound gorillas, or moose/camel/kangaroo-on-the-table (we've used various creatures in different parts of the world), the idea is the same; identify key issues without names attached and figure out how to deal with them.

This exercise follows the process described at "**How to Vision Your Ideal Team or Culture".** The goal is to address the biggest barriers to reaching the leadership team's ideal state. Unless a leadership team is exceptionally open and extraordinary (in the top 10%) already (which means 90% aren't), most team leaders don't realize how their authority, style, or the group's power dynamics stifle conversations about what's really going on.

One senior VP in a team often challenged (some said bullied) the team to "put on their big boy/girl pants and speak up." He was a stronger member of the team in a more powerful position. When we used the following process to give everyone an equal and anonymous voice and vote he was very surprised to learn about a few critical barriers that reduced the team's effectiveness but were never discussed.

This process is designed for a neutral outside facilitator to use. Self-lead variations of steps 1 to 5 include using anonymous tools like Survey Monkey or meeting software connecting phones/tablets/computers to a central presentation point program and displaying results for the group to see in PowerPoint slides.

1. Each participant writes down up to three "moose" issues the leadership team needs to address if their vision of the ideal future is going to move from dreaming to implementation.
2. Only the facilitator sees these notes, shuffles them, and reads the notes to a few scribes from the group who summarize (some moose descriptions are quite detailed) and rewrite the issue on Post-It-Notes to protect anonymity/openly airing issues and put the focus on the message not the messenger.
3. The Post-It-Notes "moose" are clustered/grouped into themes and given titles through whole group discussion. Then each cluster is numbered (can get as high as 12 moose)
4. Each participant hands in his or her secret ballot vote of the top moose by writing three cluster numbers on a piece of paper only seen by the facilitator.
5. Three or four moose will inevitably get most of the votes.
6. Sub-groups are then formed around each issue. Their task is to identify what they feel the core or root issue is, brainstorm possible solutions, and bring back their recommended actions to the larger group.

Time and again we see the power of this process to foster real -- and courageous conversations -- that surface barriers that need to be addressed.

Go to *Moose on the Table* for more insights and a quiz designed to help you decide if your team has a few moose lurking in your meeting rooms.

Do These Attributes Describe Coaching in Your Organization?

Many managers see people as they are and treat them according to what they see. Outstanding coaches, however, see people as they could be and work to grow that potential.

If you buy a little goldfish and keep it in a small bowl it will remain no bigger than a few inches long. Move that same fish to a large aquarium and it will double or triple in size. Put the goldfish in a large pond and it can grow up to a foot long! The biggest factor that determines the size of the fish is the size of its environment. And so it is with people.

A less effective manager would take a small goldfish and keep it in the little bowl because it would be inefficient and wasteful to put it in a larger environment. Good coaches know better!

Our research shows that extraordinary coaches share the following attributes. How many of these attributes describe your coaching or the coaches in your organization?

- Caring deeply about the coachee's progress
- Believing people can grow, change, and improve
- Focusing on the future
- Showing interest beyond immediate job performance
- Allowing solutions to come from the coachee
- Having more frequent, shorter conversations
- Supporting and encouraging

Learn more from this short video clip: **Keys to Extraordinary Coaching**

Have you ever experienced a leader who's very strong at coaching and mentoring but doesn't get results? People feel great working with him or her, but the job doesn't get done. What's the likelihood this leader would be rated in the top ten percent of leaders?

How about a leader who is very good at getting results -- he or she really delivers -- but not much of a coach? How likely is he or she to be rated in the top 10 percent of leaders?

Research based on over 250,000 360 assessments of roughly 25,000 leaders shows that either of the above combinations produces leaders in the 90th percentile less than 10% of the time. How often do you think a leader who is strong at both energizing people to achieve results and coaching and mentoring others is rated in the top 10% of leaders? Hint; it's much higher than most people realize.

This short video clip -- **The Impact of Coaching Effectiveness** -- shows the research behind this powerful combination and how dramatically these two competencies turbo-boost a leader to the very top. You can then see the dramatic impact of coaching skills on turnover, engagement, discretionary effort, and leader satisfaction.

No other leadership behavior is more correlated with increasing employee engagement than a leader's coaching effectiveness. Outstanding coaching skills rocket leaders to top-tier effectiveness.

Many crazy-busy, frenetic managers believe it's a trade-off: "Either I deliver results (often by micromanaging and pushing hard) or I coach and develop people. Which do you want me to do?"

Highly effective leaders get results through people. They understand that peak performance comes from empowering, energizing, focusing, and developing people to their highest potential to own and deliver outstanding outcomes.

Tweet Reading: Recommended Online Articles

This section summarizes last month's LinkedIn Updates and Twitter Tweets about online articles or blog posts that I've flagged as worth reading. These are usually posted on weekends when I am doing much of my reading for research, learning, or leisure. You can follow me on Twitter at **https://twitter.com/JimClemmer**

My original tweet commenting on the article follows each title and descriptor from the original source:

More research that countering the growing mountain of rubbish on how leading millennials is different than leading others.

> **"Are You Still Maligning Millennials? Stop"** -- Joseph Folkman
> **www.forbes.com**
> *"A millennial raised his hand, stood up and said, "I am so tired of hearing this garbage about millennials and none of it is true!" He received an ovation of support from the audience".*

Niels-Peter van Doorn, Head of Leadership Consulting at Borderless, discusses their Borderless Leadership Development Survey 2016.

> **"Is Leadership Development Still on the Agenda?"** -- E-book or podcast Leadership
> **www.zengerfolkman.com**
> *"Half of the respondents were not enthusiastic about the effectiveness of leadership-development initiatives and the funding, attention, and support they get from upper management."*

Research on a balanced approach delivering results while strengthening teamwork and unity.

> **"4 Ways to be More Effective at Execution"** -- Jack Zenger and Joe Folkman, *Harvard Business Review* blog
> **https://hbr.org**
> *"We looked at thousands of leaders who were rated as being highly effective at execution and looked for the coinciding behaviors that enabled this skill. Four behaviors in particular stood out..."*

The time and effort a leader invests in personal development depends heavily on the example of his/her boss.

> **"#1 Sign Someone Isn't a Great Leader"** -- Marshall Goldsmith
> **www.marshallgoldsmithfeedforward.com**
> *"When your boss acts like he or she is perfect and tells everyone else they need to improve this is a sure sign that the leader isn't great. Worse yet, this behavior can be copied at every level of management."*

Read *The Leader Letter* in Twice Weekly Installments

The **items in each month's issue of** *The Leader Letter* **are first published in my twice weekly blog during the previous month.**

If you read each blog post (or issue of *The Leader Letter*) as it's published **over twelve months you'll have read the equivalent of a leadership book**. And you'll pick up a few practical leadership tips that help you use time more strategically and tame your E-Beast!

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@ ClemmerGroup.com** or connect with me on **LinkedIn**, **Twitter**, **FaceBook**, or my **blog**!

May the Force (of strengths) be with you!

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