

THE LEADER LETTER

Leading with *STRENGTH*

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APRIL 2013, ISSUE 121

Ten Year Anniversary Issue

One of the most celebrated anniversaries is birthdays. Today is the 10th birthday of ***The Leader Letter***. I published *The Leader Letter* in April 2003 to coincide with and announce the publication of my fifth book, [The Leader's Digest: Timeless Principles for Team and Organization Success](#). I signed thousands of pre-ordered books that weekend while wearing my sweatshirt emblazoned with "So many books and so little time" My hand was cramped for days!



In that first issue I said *The Leader Letter* would be a "try monthly" publication. That is, I'd try to publish it each month. I've managed to maintain that pace. Mostly it's been a labor of love and quite fulfilling. Of course, there are times when meeting deadlines has made the whole effort feel like a lot of work. What's kept me grinding through those times is reader feedback by e-mail or at speaking engagements, retreats, and workshops.

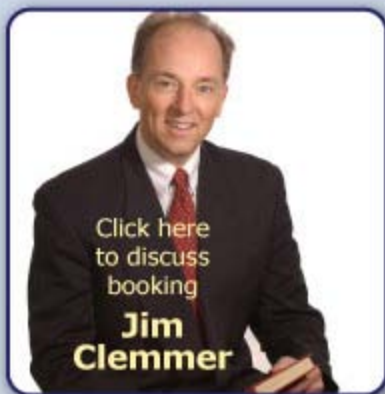
Since the first issue I've written two more books ([Moose on the Table: A Novel Approach to Communications @ Work](#) and [Growing @ the Speed of Change: Your Inspir-actional How-To Guide For Leading Yourself and Others through Constant Change](#)). About five years ago I moved from writing each monthly issue all at one time to writing two [blog posts](#) per week and publishing the eight

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monthly posts as the next month's **Leader Letter**. This allowed me to pace my writing and reduce the monthly deadline pressure. It also allows readers to enter their email address on our [main blog page](#) and receive each blog by email as soon as it's posted each Tuesday and Thursday. Anyone [connected to me on LinkedIn](#) or following me on [twitter](#) is also notified.

Hundreds of past articles and blog posts are available in [The Leader Letter archive](#). You can read them by month or through 30 topic areas clustered under sections of Organization Improvement, Self Leadership, and Leading Others. You can also search the archive by key word.

The biggest shift in the focus of our business and **The Leader Letter** has been in the past year since we've become strategic partners with Zenger Folkman. The [September 2012 issue](#) introduced and gave background to this exciting new direction.

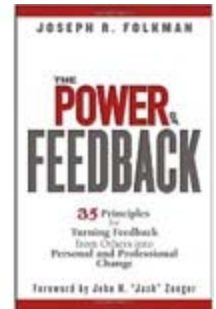
I gave months of deep thought and plenty of investigation on deciding whether to form our first partnership since founding the company in 1994. The power of ZF's [Strengths-Based Leadership Development System](#) has far exceeded my expectations. As I wrote in [Manifesto for a Leadership Development Revolution](#), this pioneering approach is a major breakthrough. As a concept, the research and logic of building strengths versus fixing weaknesses makes sense. The big gap has been exactly *how to* build strengths. Zenger Folkman's evidence-based and rigorous methodology provides the map.

This issue continues to bring you research, insights, and how-to steps on strengths-based leadership development. Although growing, there are still a fairly small number of executives, HR, and development professionals shifting from traditional approaches to the much more effective strengths-based approach. I hope this issue inspires you to look deeper at this powerful new methodology. First heralded by pioneering management thinker, Peter Drucker in the 60s, we're finally developing the science and methodologies to bring about the biggest change in leadership development of the past 50 years.

The research-based and converging fields of emotional intelligence, positive psychology, appreciative inquiry, and strengths-based leadership development are breaking traditional paradigms and taking us to whole new levels of personal, team and organization effectiveness. I can't wait to see how far this takes us in the next ten years!

BOOK REVIEW: *THE POWER OF FEEDBACK* BY JOE FOLKMAN

"I'd like to give you a little feedback" sends shivers up the spine of many people. Sometimes prefaced by a cursory point or two on our strengths or what we did well, most of the feedback centers on what we've done wrong or on fixing our weaknesses. Rather than benefiting from the power of feedback, too many people have developed the fear of feedback.



Feedback fear, focusing on weaknesses, misunderstanding what drives profound improvement, and poor coaching skills are key reasons performance management systems are a huge sore spot in many organizations. Managers often avoid giving performance feedback or doing appraisals because of their bad experiences with giving and receiving feedback. Since most 360 assessments (anonymous ratings from direct reports, peers, manager, and others) focus on weaknesses, some organizations have had such negative experiences with them that they've been banned.

Joe Folkman is a renowned expert in psychometrics or measuring psychological factors. He wrote his PhD dissertation on data he collected from 360 assessments. Since then he's developed feedback and measurement tools around a growing database now comprised of over a half million assessments on almost 50,000 leaders. Long-time feedback, executive coaching, and leadership development clients include AT&T, General Motors, Boeing, ConocoPhillips, CIBC, General Mills, Wells Fargo, and many others.

In [*The Power of Feedback: 35 Principles for Turning Feedback from Others into Personal and Professional Change*](#) Joe draws from his extensive experience and focuses especially on the groundbreaking work he and Jack Zenger began in 2002 when they wrote ***The Extraordinary Leader: Turning Good Managers into Great Leaders*** and founded Zenger Folkman. Since The CLEMMER Group became strategic partners with ZF last spring we've had experiences with their [Strengths-Based Leadership Development System](#) that have profoundly shifted our approaches in helping leaders and organization use feedback much more productively. The principles Joe outlines in *The Power of Feedback* provide a refreshing new approach to more positively using feedback as rocket fuel in moving leaders from good to great performance.

The Power of Feedback is based on solid research and filled with very practical and helpful advice for harnessing the power of feedback to become an extraordinary leader. Here are a few of the keys to using feedback in new and much more effective ways:

- Developing highly effective leadership is not the absence of weaknesses but the presence of a few profound strengths.
- A leader can significantly change perceptions of, and responses to, his or her leadership behaviors by asking for feedback, finding out what attributes are most important, and asking for help in developing his or her strengths in those areas from good to great.
- Leaders should consider weaker areas as lesser strengths to be given little attention unless there's a skill deficiency that overshadows and blocks others from seeing his or her strengths. Then we do need to fix this fatal flaw before we can build strengths.
- Moving a leadership skill or competency from poor to good can be done through traditional development methods. But moving a strength from good to extraordinary can only be done by working on its companion skills. Joe was instrumental in developing cross-training maps for showing how to do that for every key leadership skill found in their research.
- Leaders need to focus on a key leadership strength that will give them the highest leverage for their position. Developing just one profound strength from good to great creates a 24-percentile increase in overall leadership effectiveness!
- To get the biggest benefit from feedback leaders should thank everyone, acknowledge the validity of their feedback, outline what he or she intends to focus on, enlist their help, and find ways to quickly and visibly show behavior changes.

Feedback, like fire, can burn and destroy or warm and energize. A strengths-based approach provides a powerful combustion chamber that's proven to turbo-charge leadership performance. One of Zenger Folkman's long term Clients is BARD Access Systems providing vascular devices to the healthcare industry. Vice President of Human Resources, Mary Settle, reflects on their journey to shifting the power of performance feedback:

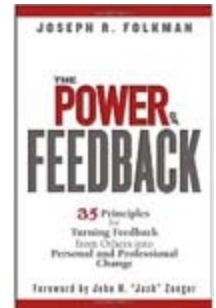
" ... their research caused us to rethink our performance management philosophy. We revamped our process to orient it more toward building employees' strengths. The results have been remarkable ... The biggest change has been in the energy people have for the performance management process. It is now something that most employees look forward to. How many companies can say that?"

Harness the tremendous power of strengths-based feedback at [The Extraordinary Leader public workshops](#) in Toronto or Calgary in May.

THOUGHTS THAT MAKE YOU GO HMMM ON ... *THE POWER OF FEEDBACK* BY JOE FOLKMAN

"The only people who are truly incompetent are those who refuse to listen to and accept feedback from others."

"People do not give equal attention to all attributes. Some characteristics count more than others. Understanding which characteristics are most critical is an essential element in bringing about change."



"Small changes in specific areas can have a significant impact on others' perceptions of you and create a halo effect."

"We have found that leaders with strengths tended to be rated as more likely to be promoted, receive a greater number of stock options, and have direct reports who are less likely to quit."

"After detailed research analysis, it became apparent to me that the same companion skills appear consistently in repeated studies, and companion behaviors were found to be associated with every skill studied. This breakthrough indicated that the head-on approach is only one way, and perhaps not always the best way to address the problem of change. The combination of the two skills -- the desired one and a companion one -- increases effectiveness and is often easier to carry out."

"It didn't seem to matter which competency people had strength in, as long as they performed that competency extremely well -- at the 90th percentile or better."

"Changes that last are those that are natural and consistent with our core character and personal style."

"We found that the key to predicting highly effective people was not the absence of weaknesses, but rather the presence of a few profound strengths."

Harness the tremendous power of strengths-based feedback and competency cross-training at [The Extraordinary Leader public workshops](#) in Toronto or Calgary in May.

THE BEST POSITIVITY/NEGATIVITY RATIO FOR PEAK PERFORMANCE

Given the overwhelming research on the power of optimism, can leaders and teams be too positive? Intuitively we know that's true. An overly positive view often leads to whitewashing issues as if pretending they don't exist will make them go away. Over-the-top optimists often avoid the courageous conversations that address the difficult [Moose on the Table](#) issues.



On the other hand, we also know that many leaders and teams are often way too negative. Energy and engagement levels plummet as cynics [drive the Bitter Bus down Helpless Highway through Wallow Hollow right into the heart of Pity City!](#)

Extensive research supporting our [Strengths-Based Leadership Development System](#) shows that for most people, building strengths is 2-3 three times more effective than fixing weaknesses. However, if a leader with an overshadowing weakness or fatal flaw focuses on improving that skill he or she will see dramatic and highly noticeable improvement that significantly boosts his or her leadership effectiveness.

So what's the right balance? Where's the tipping point that will send us soaring to new heights or sinking into mediocrity and failure? In "The Positivity Ratio" chapter of her book, *Positivity: Groundbreaking Research Reveals How to Embrace the Hidden Strength of Positive Emotions, Overcome Negativity, and Thrive*, Professor Barbara Frederickson (who positive psychology founder, Martin Seligman, calls "the genius of the positive psychology movement") reports from her extensive research that for "individuals, marriages, and business teams, flourishing -- or doing remarkably -- comes with positivity ratios above 3 to 1."

In their latest *Harvard Business Review* blog, [The Ideal Praise-to-Criticism Ratio](#), Jack Zenger and Joe Folkman report research on 60 business unit teams. **"The average ratio for the highest-performing teams was 5.6 (that is, nearly six positive comments for every negative one). The medium-performance teams averaged 1.9 (almost twice as many positive comments than negative ones.) But the average for the low-performing teams, at 0.36 to 1, was almost three negative comments for every positive one."**

Reflecting on Zenger Folkman's research Jack and Joe report:

- A little negative feedback can be quite helpful and -- in

the right situations -- propel leaders to show dramatically higher performance.

- Criticism can rupture relationships, reduce confidence levels, and blunt initiative.
- Positive feedback and building on strengths is by far the best pathway to improved performance for the vast majority of leaders.
- Helping average leaders become extraordinary by building on their natural strengths has the greatest team and organizational payoffs.
- Marriage research shows that almost the same positivity/negativity ratios leads to long happy marriages or pave the surest route to divorce.

Last month Joe Folkman provided a complimentary (no charge) webinar on "GOOD NEWS! Poor Leaders Can Change Their Spots." He covered:

- Data on 71 leaders who were able to elevate their leadership effectiveness from the 23rd percentile to the 56th percentile.
- The nine common leadership skills they used to change and develop.
- Fresh techniques for overcoming fatal flaws.

Click on ["GOOD NEWS! Poor Leaders Can Change Their Spots"](#) to view the webinar.

5 STEPS FOR MANAGERS TO MAXIMIZE A DIRECT REPORTS' DEVELOPMENT

Far too many organizations squander training dollars by "sheep dipping" supervisors, managers, or executives through development workshops and hoping something will stick. Decades of studies show time and again leadership behavior change rarely lasts in a "once and done" approach.



One study by a large international learning and development firm found that the optimum ratio of activities contributing to learning effectiveness were 26% on pre-work, 24% on the learning event, and 50% on follow-up. However, they also found that the typical allocations were 10% on pre-work, 85% on the learning event, and only 5% on follow-up! Talk about wasting development dollars! This huge gap is clearly why the effectiveness of leadership development investments was rated as only 7% by CEOs in a large scale global study.

In his *Forbes* column, "[The Magic of Managerial Involvement](#)", Jack Zenger reports on Zenger Folkman's data showing the powerful payoff of manager follow through when one of his or her direct reports goes through development activity like the [Extraordinary Leader and/or Extraordinary Coach workshop](#). *"The take-away is simple. If a company wants to greatly increase the ROI from their training and development budget, then it **must get the immediate manager much more involved in their subordinate's development**. There's no additional outlay of money and **it makes a huge difference.**"*

Jack provides 5 very powerful steps a manager should take to dramatically increase skill development for his or her direct report going through a leadership development session:

1. Establish Expectations
2. Check for Understanding
3. Implement On-the-Job Application
4. Talk About it Frequently
5. Create Follow-Up Measures

Read "[The Magic of Managerial Involvement](#)" for suggestions on how to cover each step.

Our May [Extraordinary Leader and Extraordinary Coach public workshops](#) in Calgary and Toronto are a rare opportunity for you and/or other members on your team to boost your leadership and coaching skills. These are usually in-house sessions run inside organizations. You can make the experience even more effective by coupling it with pre-workshop preparation and post-workshop follow through. *The Extraordinary Leader* includes use of our [ActionPlan Mapper](#) to maximize follow through.

DOUBLE LEARNER MOTIVATION WITH STRENGTHS-BASED LEADERSHIP WEBINAR NOW AVAILABLE

Needs assessments and performance evaluations look for gaps and design training programs to fix weaknesses. This is a major reason participant motivation to build skills has been very low and transfer of learning poor.



Last month I delivered a 60 minute webinar on The Strengths-Based Leadership Development Revolution and its refreshingly different impact on leadership development. Some of the Zenger Folkman research I discussed was a series of pre and post studies that examined the impact of leaders choosing to fix

weaknesses versus building on existing strengths. 12 to 18 months later the leaders who magnified their existing strengths showed two - three times more improvement in leadership effectiveness than leaders who worked on fixing their weaknesses!

The fast-paced webinar provided a broad overview of this ground-breaking new approach including:

- The sixteen empirically identified key leadership competencies in five clusters that cause leaders and their team/organizations to flounder or flourish.
- The huge performance differences between "good" and "extraordinary" leaders and the dramatic impact on his or her team/organization.
- How developing just three existing strengths out of sixteen competencies catapults a leader's effectiveness from the 34th to the 80th percentile.
- Evidence-based strength development using Companion Competencies, cross-training, and non-linear approaches.
- Why many needs assessments and 360 feedback tools are developing a negative reputation -- associated with accentuating weaknesses -- and how to correct the problem.

You can now access and [watch the archived webinar here](#) (you need a free registration on the HR.com site). Once you've watched the webinar, take our [online Strengths-Based Leadership Development quiz](#). It won't win you any trivia games but you can test your knowledge of this ground-breaking new approach!

Congratulations to our two webinar book draw winners, Romy Schnaiberg and Cyndi Seifried. A copy of [How to Be Exceptional: Drive Leadership Success by Magnifying Your Strengths](#), signed by all four authors has been sent to each of them.

WE'RE WAITING TOO LONG TO START INVESTING IN LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Jack Zenger was recently talking with long-time Client, Symantec, a prominent Silicon Valley software firm about the remarkable success they've had using Zenger Folkman's [Strengths-Based Leadership Development System](#). The company has gathered compelling evidence that ***"leaders who participate***

in their development programs are getting higher scores on essentially every leadership competency they measure ... Upper



management, already highly supportive of their efforts, now has hard evidence that confirms the value of their investment."

Jack asked Sandy Hunter, Senior Director of Leadership Development, if they were doing this all over again what would they do differently. Without hesitation she replied, "***We'd begin earlier in people's careers.***"

Following articles about how we're waiting too long to train our leaders in his *Harvard Business Review* and *Forbes* blogs, Jack was interviewed by *Chief Learning Officer* on Zenger Folkman's research and experience around this vital organization performance issue. In "[Start Development Sooner](#)" Jack states:

- "Today we are devoting roughly three-fourths of our development effort to Gen X and 20 percent on Gen Y. We're investing as much on those in their mid-50 as we are on Gen Y, and that seems misguided to me."
- " ... leadership development should be more broadly disseminated. It begins with the premise that you want leadership to exist at all levels."
- "The current "sink or swim" approach to developing leaders obviously works for some individuals. But how many careers would have been dramatically altered if the individual had received development at an earlier age? And what of their impact on subordinates during those years they were muddling through?"
- " ... strong evidence to support the fact that leaders are more inclined to stay with an organization where they feel they are growing and developing."
- "Gen Y is sometimes stereotyped as being self-centered. Yet on the leadership competence of collaboration and teamwork, they were at the 60th percentile, while the percentile scores were lower for each older generation."
- "The final surprise was the extremely high scores of the Gen Y group on the dimension of practicing self-development. Here they were at the 64th percentile while the boomers were at the 52nd percentile. This contradicts the image of complacent know-it-alls that is held by some."

Last month Jack delivered a 60 minute webinar on this topic entitled "***Investing in Leadership Development: Are We Waiting Too Long to Start?***" [Click here to access](#) this archived webinar with ZF's proprietary research and experience as well as participant polls.

You can invest in your own or your teams' development at our [Extraordinary Leader and Extraordinary Coach public workshops](#) that I'll be delivering in May in Toronto and Calgary. Learn about U.S. locations and dates with Zenger Folkman at [Coming Events](#).

RESEARCH AND WEBINAR ON POOR LEADERS CHANGING THEIR SPOTS

Alongside the now discredited belief that leaders are born not made is the equally erroneous view that bad leaders can't shift their behaviors and become much better. This belief tends to be especially widespread about more seasoned and senior executives.



In their *Harvard Business Review* blog ["Bad Leaders Can Change their Spots"](#) Jack Zenger and Joe Folkman refute this common belief with research data from a large bank, large high-tech communications company, and an Ivy League University. Through 360 assessments the study identified 96 executives who were rated worse than 90% of their peers in leadership effectiveness. Through subsequent feedback and coaching 71 (about 75%) of those leaders showed significant improvement in a follow up assessment 18 - 24 months later.

And this large group of "older dogs learning new tricks" weren't just making minor changes. They actually moved up 33 percentile points from the bottom to above average!

The study showed that the biggest flaws of these bad bosses were interpersonal skills such as developing others, collaboration and teamwork, inspiring and motivating others, and building relationships as well as practicing self-development. These executives tended to be much stronger in leading change initiatives, driving for results, or honesty and integrity. Those strengths likely explain why these managers were originally promoted up the organization. But their lack of interpersonal skills and personal development (emotional intelligence) eventually stuck out so far people around them could not see past these flaws becoming fatal to their careers.

The authors conclude; ***"the exceptionally good news, our data show, is that far more often than not, those who take these issues seriously can succeed in shedding bad habits to become markedly better leaders. New spots, anyone?"***

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- Fresh techniques for overcoming fatal flaws.

Click on "[GOOD NEWS! Poor Leaders Can Change Their Spots](#)" to view the webinar.

TWEET READING: RECOMMENDED ONLINE RESOURCES

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.



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

More evidence that "soft" leadership skills produce hard results -- and leaders can change, grow, and develop their effectiveness.

["Bad Leaders Can Change Their Spots"](#) - Jack Zenger and Joseph Folkman
<http://blogs.hbr.org/>

"The exceptionally good news, our data show, is that far more often than not, those who take these issues seriously can succeed in shedding bad habits to become markedly better leaders. New spots, anyone?"

Sylvie captured key points I was illustrating with my novel approach to leadership development. This was one of my favorite books to write.

["Review of Moose on the Table"](#) - Sylvie Marie Heroux
<http://sylviemheroux.wordpress.com>

"Moose on the Table is not a cookbook, nor a book about hunting moose. It is a didactic novel about how to better manage people and create high performing teams in organizations."

Recognizing and dealing with the strongest force that pulls us off track can help us to stay focused on our development or change goals.

["Sidetracked: Why Can't We Stick to the Plan?"](#) - Francesca Gino, HBS Working Knowledge
<http://hbswk.hbs.edu/>

"Three different sets of forces influence our decisions in ways we commonly fail to anticipate: (1) forces from within ourselves, (2) forces from our relationships with others, and (3) forces from the outside world."

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 one of my books. 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@Clemmer.net or connect with me on [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), [FaceBook](#), or my [blog](#)!

May the Force (of strengths) be with you!

Jim



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