

THE LEADER LETTER

Leading with *STRENGTH*

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APRIL 2014, ISSUE 133

April 1 as April Fool's Day or All Fools' Day can be traced back to the Roman Festival of Hilaria and the Medieval Feast of Fools or the Feast of the Ass dating from the fifth century in various European countries. In 1392, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* is set in on March 32 or April Fool's Day.



Another long tradition that's deeply embedded in our culture is the belief that becoming a better personal, team, or organizational leader means fixing our shortcomings. As Joe Folkman explains in the two minute video clip [What Makes a Great Leader](#) this thinking causes leaders to try improving themselves across a full range of skills -- many of which they don't enjoy and aren't likely to improve. That's proving to be ineffective if not foolish.

But ignoring a big weakness that's causing us a major problem is also foolhardy. The key is distinguishing whether our all too human weaker areas might be a flaw fatal to our leadership effectiveness. In his follow-up two minute video, [Leadership: Weaknesses vs. Fatal Flaws](#), Joe explains the critical difference and shows how Steve Jobs' towering strengths overshadowed his well-publicized weaknesses.

This April issue publishes my March [blog posts](#). The first two items deal with readers' continuing struggles with wasting time on weaknesses. A widely held belief that's misdirecting many development professionals and leaders is the myth of the well-rounded leader. As I write in the second item, I've been guilty of perpetuating what's now proving to be a foolish misconception about leadership development.

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You may **reprint any items** from *The Leader Letter* in your own printed publication or e-newsletter as long as you include this paragraph:

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This issue also provides updates on, and archive links to, recent webinars, introduces Brad Smith as our new Director of Business Development, and new research on creating a culture of quality. And we outline this summer's Extraordinary Leadership Summit in Park City, Utah. It's a rare chance to meet and mingle with ZF leaders and organizational leaders who are pioneering strengths-based leadership approaches with distinctly 'unfoolish' results.

I hope you weren't fooled by pranksters yesterday. And maybe it's time to stop fooling around with fixing weaknesses and closing gaps.

STRUGGLES WITH WASTING TIME ON WEAKNESSES

If you're not connected with me on LinkedIn you may have missed the discussion generated by my post, "[Wasting Time on Weaknesses](#)". Some commentators like Richard Peterson agree that weakness-based improvement plans are demotivating and wasteful. He goes further to call people "delusional" who continue to focus on weaknesses despite the "overwhelming evidence to the contrary."



Gary Walden doesn't agree. He voices the common belief that "developing" means enhancing an area of weaker performance to become "well-rounded." He suggests calling weaknesses "opportunities" to try giving them a more positive spin. He uses the example of a bodybuilder who doesn't only work on "vanity muscles" but works even harder on weak spots.

Gary's expressing common difficulties people have with taking a strengths-based approach. I am not sure the bodybuilder analogy works here. Our research shows that 3 - 5 strengths taken to the 90th percentile boosts leader effectiveness to the top 10 - 20th percentile. I don't know much about bodybuilding (one look at me in a Speedo will confirm that!), but I doubt that building just a few muscles would have the same impact. Leadership -- like all human interactions -- is driven by perception. A few towering strengths (if not diminished by "fatal flaws") dramatically drives up the overall perception of a leader and causes most people around him or her to respond accordingly.

Drew Williams agreed with Gary and sees building strengths as limiting the boundaries of personal development. I recognize where he's coming from -- because I was there for years -- when he also supports the belief in well-rounded leaders. And he sees building strengths as only applying to senior leaders because people below that don't have the option to work only on strengths and it limits their value to the organization.

My recent post, "[Talent Management: Developing Strengths of Individual Contributors](#)", cites research and links to a white paper showing how building strengths at all levels is much more effective than focusing on weaknesses. My next blog post will look at the widely-held fallacy of the well-rounded leader.

[Click here](#) to read the full LinkedIn discussion about Wasting Time on Weaknesses. If you're not connected to me on LinkedIn, please go to <http://ca.linkedin.com/in/jimclemmer/> and send me an invitation to connect.

EXCEPTIONAL LEADERS AREN'T WELL-ROUNDED

I've been guilty of perpetuating the misconception of the well-rounded leader. Like many training and development professionals I used to believe that leadership skills development comes from assessing leaders against a leadership framework or competency model and developing an improvement plan to round out the flat or weak spots. But this long-held view is no longer supported by more recent research. And it fails the common sense test when we think back on our experience....



Think of the best leader you've ever known. What strengths made him or her really stand out? Typical responses often include outstanding communicator, superior strategic thinker, exceptional coach and developer of people, very high trust and integrity, extremely inspiring and motivating, stretching others to reach higher, brilliant technical/analytical skills, or excellent team builder. Often 3 or 4 of these skills done extraordinarily well lifted this leader to lofty heights.

Did he or she also have any weaknesses? Of course; they weren't perfect -- they were human. Responses sometimes include inattention to details, poor time management, moody, narrow focus, inflexibility, intolerance, weak technical/analytical skills, not a people person, or low charisma.

When we really analyze the outstanding leaders we've known, very few are well-rounded. All have flat spots or weaker areas. But their strengths were so towering they overshadowed these weaknesses. We were willing to "cut them some slack" or accept -- and even compensate for -- their weaker areas in order to be elevated by their exceptional strengths. If, however, a weakness was big enough, it has the reverse effect and this person's "fatal flaw" sinks them to the average or even worst leader categories.

Zenger Folkman's research on this halo effect is very clear. You can read more in our white paper "[Developing Strengths or Weaknesses: Overcoming the Lure of the Wrong Choice.](#)" ZF Chief Operating Officer, Bob Sherwin just published an excellent article on "[The Power of Counterintuitive Thinking in Leadership Development](#)" in *Chief Learning Officer* magazine.

It's time to shift thinking about leadership development from well-rounded to well-grounded -- in strengths.

WEBINAR: FOUR REASONS TO DEVELOP THE LEADERS YOU'VE BEEN OVERLOOKING!

My recent blog post on "[Talent Management: Developing Strengths of Individual Contributors](#)" reviewed four key reasons for developing key individual contributors. It also provided links to our white paper "[Individual Contributors: Building on Strengths is the Foundation of Success at Every Level](#)".



Some highly professional individual contributors wield great influence and make critical contributions to the organization but don't have a managerial title. They epitomize our long held view that leadership is an action, not a position.

These leaders without the title can be pivotal to team or organizational success. But they often get overlooked for any kind of leadership development because they don't formally manage or supervise anyone and aren't thought to need training in management basics.

Key individual contributors are huge assets for every organization and there's an enormous opportunity to provide this group with much of the same development experiences their managerial colleagues receive.

For several years, Zenger Folkman has conducted development sessions for professional, individual contributors. Please join us to learn the four reasons to develop these folks. You'll find out just how these forgotten resources could be increasing their value and benefiting your own organization in ways you may have completely overlooked!

Last month Jack Zenger delivered a webinar on [Four Reasons to Develop the Leaders You've Been Overlooking](#). [Click here](#) to access this complimentary archived webinar.

NEW DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND PUBLIC WORKSHOPS

After months of searching for just the right executive, I am delighted that [Brad Smith](#) recently joined our team as Director, Business Development. Brad has nearly twenty years of experience as a trusted advisor in organizational effectiveness, leadership/culture development, learning, career and talent management, consulting, Human Resources, and performance improvement to hundreds of organizations in the public and private sectors. Throughout his career, [Brad's](#) helped organizations boost their effectiveness by aligning with the customers/stakeholders they serve, developing effective organizational strategies, and attracting, retaining, and growing top talent to bring about critical change.



In his new role [Brad](#) will match The CLEMMER Group's range of leadership, team, and organization development programs and services with Client needs. This includes leadership and organization assessment, strengths-based leadership development, service/quality improvement, culture change/development, leading change, strategic planning, team building, lean/six sigma, health and safety, and coaching skills development.

Sometimes, to his wife's chagrin (she's come to grips with the inevitable) Brad's outgoing personality and love of people draws him to lead the neighborhood -- or just about any -- social committee! He also loves to be challenged on anything to do with sports, music, or movie trivia! Brad would love to connect through his [LinkedIn profile](#), e-mail at Brad.Smith@clemmergroup.com, or phone at (519) 391-1073.

We've set the dates for our [spring series of public workshops for *The Extraordinary Leader and The Extraordinary Coach*](#). On May 5 and 6 I'll be delivering the sessions in Richmond, BC hosted by the City of Richmond. On May 8 and 9 I'll facilitate the workshops in Edmonton, AB hosted by Servus Credit Union. And on May 14 and 15 I'll be in Mississauga (10 minutes from Toronto's international airport) at the Centre for Health & Safety Innovation, hosted by Workplace Safety and Prevention Services. [Click here](#) for more information and to register.

There's lots on the grow! I hope to see you soon.

TWO KEY CONCEPTS FROM LAST MONTH'S WEBCAST

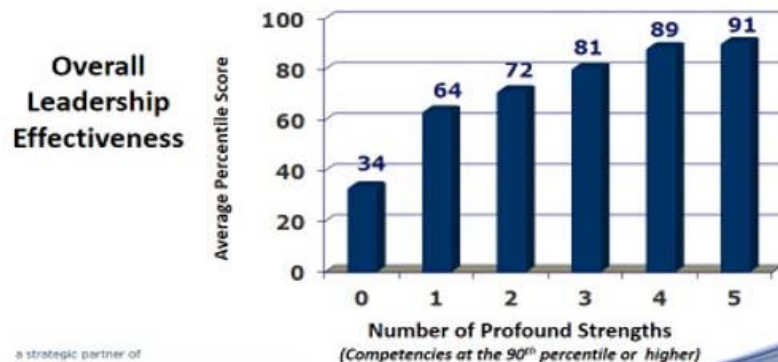
Last month we had over 500 sites from 30 countries registered for my 60 minute webcast on [Building Leadership Skills and Coaching Culture](#). The webinar was divided into two sections. The first half outlined Five Keys to Building Extraordinary Leaders. The second part was on Six Keys to Building a Coaching Culture with Exceptional Leaders.



Over a third of attendees completed our post-webcast survey. One question was, "What points from today's webinar did you find the most useful?" Overwhelmingly participants cited the research on building strengths rather than fixing weaknesses as a key learning. As discussed in this newsletter ("Struggles with Wasting Time on Weaknesses" and "Exceptional Leaders Aren't Well Rounded") I showed research on the "halo effect" of towering strengths elevating leaders from good to great. Here's a slide showing this exponential impact of lopsided (as opposed to well-rounded) leaders:

Our Research Shows Strengths-Based Development is Most Effective

Extraordinary leaders are distinguished by existence of a few profound strengths, not the absence of weaknesses



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In the coaching section of the webcast a large majority of participants mentioned this distinction as being a key point for them:

Development Distinctions

Training

- Trainer possesses skills or information students lack.
- Primary activity is transmission of information.
- Teacher/student relationship is typically temporary and narrow in focus.

Mentoring

- Senior person conveys wisdom and corporate culture.
- Mentor has traveled the path mentee is seeking.
- Provides connections, references, and advice.

Coaching

- Coach could be superior, subordinate, or peer.
- Coach does not need same background or experiences.
- Enables others to work through and solve their own problems.

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The archived webcast is now available for you to watch. [Click here](#) to access it. Drop me an e-mail at Jim.Clemmer@Clemmergroup.com with your feedback or questions. Join our [Strengths-Based Leadership Development LinkedIn discussion group](#) for a deeper look at this revolutionary approach.

JOIN US AT THE EXTRAORDINARY LEADERSHIP SUMMIT

Zenger Folkman is rapidly being recognized as one of the leading-edge leadership development and consulting firms of the 21st century. Global leaders in the automotive, financial, engineering, technology, retail, consumer products, and professional services sectors are using ZF's ground-breaking systems as the foundation of their leadership and organization development.



Now in the second year of our ZF partnership, we're seeing firsthand the power of their strengths-based leadership and coaching development systems. If you're interested in dramatically boosting personal, team, or organization leadership and coaching skills there's an incredibly rare opportunity you'll want to seize this summer. And you could combine this powerful Leadership Summit with vacation and leisure time in picturesque Park City -- one of Utah's top tourist destinations favoured by entertainment stars during Robert Redford's Sundance Film Festival.

For about the cost of our two-day public workshops you have an extremely unique and unusual chance to immerse yourself for three days:

- Hear from -- and chat with two leading international authorities in leadership -- and especially the revolutionary new field of Strengths-Based Leadership: Joe Folkman and Jack Zenger.
- Learn from ground-breaking leadership/organization development approaches. Speakers include:
 - Bill Ribaudo, Managing Partner – Deloitte
 - Joe Garbus, VP, Talent & Leadership Development – Celgene
 - Brenda Norman, Director, Workforce Planning & Development - State of Minnesota
 - Rhonda Ryan, Program Manager, Leadership Development - Sony PlayStation
 - Mara Olaizola, Talent & Career Development – Renault
 - Linda Simon, Sr. VP, Leadership & Org Development with Maureen Williams, Director, Leadership Development – DIRECTV
- Participate in two of the three Zenger Folkman's core workshops; ***The Extraordinary Leader, The Extraordinary Coach, The Inspiring Leader*** ([click here](#) to get more info and download brochures), or Elevating Feedback. *Our standard fees for two days of these public workshops alone will cover this Summit fee and most of your hotel costs.*
- Have breakfast, lunch, or dinner -- or just chat time -- with me or [Brad Smith](#) (our new Director of Business Development) to discuss what you're learning and how you can apply the powerful leadership development approaches from this Summit.
- Get up close and personal, network, and share best practices with senior leaders and leadership/organization development professionals.
- Spend time with senior ZF executives, Bob Sherwin and Barbara Steel, co-authors of the highly acclaimed [How to Be Exceptional: Drive Leadership Success by Magnifying Your Strengths](#).
- Network and enjoy dinner at Jack Zenger's "manor estate" home on 80 acres overlooking Midway and the Wasatch Mountains.

This is not a massive convention with hundreds or thousands of people. It's a relaxed and intimate meeting in a beautiful setting. I attended the last two Summits and they were outstanding. So [register now](#) to ensure a seat!

5th Annual Leadership Summit
July 28 – July 31, 2014 – Park City, Utah
The Chateaux Resort Deer Valley
(30 minutes from Salt Lake City airport)

<http://www.clemmergroup.com/zf/2014summitzf.html>

I hope you can join us for one of this field's premier leadership development events.

CREATING A CULTURE OF QUALITY

Social media is a key force in making the Internet truly a world wide web of interconnections. And that means the penalties or pays offs of low or high service/quality levels are exponentially multiplied.



Technology for collecting and analyzing data along with process management approaches like Lean/Six Sigma are powerful management tools. They can pinpoint areas that need improvement and map out what needs to change with "hard" clarity and impeccable logic.

Yet study after study shows up to 70% of service/quality and other organizational change efforts fail to make a lasting difference. A major stumbling block is changing behaviors up, down, and across the organization. This is a "soft" leadership issue at the heart of change.

Consulting directors Ashwin Srinivasan and Bryan Kurey have just published "Creating a Culture of Quality" in the April issue of *Harvard Business Review* with the latest in a long series of similar studies showing the huge impact of culture on service/quality levels. They start with research in the tradition of many 'cost of poor service/quality' studies reporting companies in the top quintile in their study report 46% fewer errors. Based on survey reports that it takes two hours to correct a mistake, they calculate the lowest performing companies in the survey spends \$774 million a year to resolve preventable errors. This is \$350 million more than top performing companies. "For every company moving from the bottom to the top quintile would save a company \$67 million annually."

The authors' "Four Essentials of Quality" are prime examples of the impact of "soft" leadership and culture on "hard" results:

- Maintaining a Leadership Emphasis on Quality
- Ensuring Message Credibility
- Peer Involvement
- Employee Ownership

Management systems, processes, data and analysis are often used to push employees toward using service/quality improvement tools and desired behaviors. Employees comply and -- with enough "snoopervision" -- meet minimum requirements.

Leadership pulls employees from compliance to commitment. Employees enthusiastically go above and beyond. They drive to increase service/quality because they want to not because they have to.

Further Reading/Viewing:

- "[Leadership and Culture Development to Boost Employee Engagement](#)"
- "[Leadership and Culture Development is Critical to Lean/Six Sigma Success](#)"
- "[Six Essentials to Creating an Extraordinary Culture](#)"
- "[Is Your Culture Anchored in Strengths or Weaknesses?](#)"
- "[Archived Webinar on Our Leadership and Culture Development Approaches Now Available](#)"
- "[Links for Digging Deeper Into Leading a Peak Performance Culture](#)"

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:

75% of restructuring, culture change, service/quality improvements, and other renewal efforts fail because they're partial and piecemeal.

["Why Transformation Needs a Second Chapter"](#) - Martin Reeves, Kaelin Goulet, Gideon Walter, and Michael Shanahan
www.bcgperspectives.com

"Transformation demands attention to both the short term and the long term, to efficiency as well as innovation and growth, to discipline and flexible adaptation, and to clarity of direction and empowerment."

An insightful look at Netflix's talent management values/culture to attract, retain, and manage stellar employees

["The Feedback Conundrum: Does Positive Or Negative Feedback Help You Most?"](#) -- Jack Zenger
www.Forbes.com

"Which has helped your career more? Positive feedback? Or constructive critiques? The best leaders provide both varieties of feedback well and have learned to be insightful and selective about the ideal times for each."

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@clemmergroup.com or connect with me on [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), [FaceBook](#), or my [blog](#)!

May the Force (of strengths) be with you!

Jim



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