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Fortune magazine has just published this year's list of "100 Best Companies to Work For." Since 1998 the research and consulting firm, Great Place to Work, has been conducting the most extensive employee survey in corporate America. Drawing feedback from more than 232,000 employees at companies with more than 1,000 employees, measurements are ranked and analyzed through a trust index survey and culture audit questionnaire.

These measures include "the honesty and quality of communication by managers, degree of support for employees' personal and professional lives, and the authenticity of relationships with colleagues," along with questions about benefits, employee programs, and organizational practices.



The researchers report, "organizations that perform best on measures of inclusivity, trust, pride, and camaraderie.... placed in the top 25% by this measure saw higher revenue growth than the ones in the bottom 25%." Top ranked companies had three times the growth of those in the bottom quartile.

The results of this annual survey have become such strong predictors of company success that Jerry Dodson started an investment fund in 2005 to invest in the Best Places to Work companies. *Fortune* calls him "one of the most successful fund managers of his era, overseeing \$22.5 billion." Dodson's Parnassus Endeavor fund "has delivered annualized returns of 12.2%, compared with just 8.5% for the S&P 500."

"Dodson posits that elements that define a good workplace -- from benefits like health insurance and childcare to cultural collegiality, advancement opportunities, and faith in management -- are linked to meaningful qualities that drive up stock prices, such as talent retention (leading to lower turnover costs) and increased productivity."

This is the latest in a series of studies showing that building strong and nurturing cultures produces extraordinary results. The book, ***Firms of Endearment: How World Class Companies Profit from Passion and Purpose*** draws from an extensive research study looking for companies that focused on endearing themselves to their customers, employees, suppliers, communities, and shareholders. These FoEs are driven by "aligning the interests of all in such a way that no stakeholder group gains at the expense of other stakeholder groups; rather, they all prosper together." ***Good Company: Business Success in the Worthiness Era***, shows how a strong leadership culture that's serving all of its stakeholders and society pays off for everyone buying from, working for, investing in, and doing business with the company.

There are many elements to building peak performance cultures. This issue deals with a few key components. The team leading a department, division, or entire organization is the core factor that sets the tone, direction, and

ultimate performance of its culture. You can read about seven leadership team failure factors and complete a 14-item self-assessment.

You can also look at nine reasons leaders aren't leading and click a link to watch my latest webinar, *LeaderShift: Transforming Good Managers into Great Leaders*. And you'll see how leaders falling into the bring-me-solutions-not-problems trap create a zoo of monkeys and moose that create bigger problems and reduce effectiveness. And you can learn how giving positive feedback is a vital part of building a positive, can-do culture.

Are you building a great place to work? Is your leadership boosting or blocking personal, team, and organization effectiveness?

Seven Leadership Team Failure Factors

When our kids were young I was often reminded of the old adage "children act like their parents -- despite all attempts to teach them good manners." When one of our kids did something I wasn't especially pleased with, I found myself asking "where did you learn that?" When I stood back and I reflect on it, I can start to see where that behavior came from. Their mother!

Well, maybe not. When I was honest and took a longer look in the leadership mirror, I saw that I modelled some of that behavior. But it is often tough to recognize our own behavior being reflected back to us through the people we lead. Now that our kids are starting their own families it will be fascinating to see behaviors cascading further.



In our work with culture development we can see a variation of leadership modelling; people in organizations act like their leader -- despite all attempts to train them otherwise. An **organization's culture ripples out from the team leading it**. Many leadership teams don't recognize their own behavior reflected back to them in their culture.

In my blog, "**Is Your Leadership Team Slipping into These Traps?**," I outlined seven common traps snaring many teams. Priority overload, unaligned change programs, leadership lip service, not building capacity for change, poorly run meetings, conflicting messages, and lack of follow up are typical culture shortfalls that start at the top.

We've just developed a brief assessment to help leadership teams look in the mirror. Click on **Seven Leadership Team Failure Factors** to take the 14-item assessment. You can complete the assessment and compare your total score with our scoring guide. We also provide you with links to leadership team development resources.

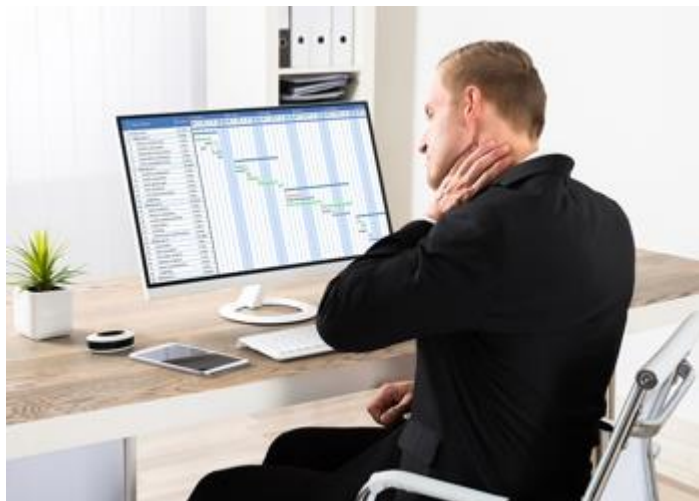
An even more powerful approach is to have your leadership team complete the assessment and compare your scores.

A culture can't exceed its leadership team. The team sets the pace and direction by their own behavior. What the team does overshadows what its leaders are saying. What example is your team providing?

Nine Reasons Leaders Aren't Leading

What percent of time do you or your leaders spend among these three areas:

1. Solving technical problems or applying your technical expertise?
2. Using data and analytical skills, sending/receiving e-mails, planning, directing, and decision making?
3. Talking individually or collectively with people inside and outside your organization, coaching, developing, and inspiring action?



Have you lost your balance? If you're like the hundreds of groups whose leaders have gone through this self or team assessment in our workshops or retreats, you feel you need to spend much more time leading and less time managing and using your technical expertise. Study after study shows that leadership skills account for 60 – 75% of the difference between leaders with the best and worst results. This includes levels of engagement, quality, safety, productivity, innovation, and customer service.

When groups discuss why they're not spending as much time leading as each leader there feels he or she needs to be, these reasons often emerge this look in the mirror:

1. **"Soft Skills" are Hard** – technical and management skills are easier to define, measure, and apply.
2. **Comfort Zone** – most leaders were promoted for his or her technical and management skills. Many aren't given a cross-training map on how to leverage his or her leadership strengths.
3. **The E-mail Beast** – screen sucking drains time from leadership activities. E-mail is a terrible way to persuade, coach, have a meaningful conversation, deal with conflict, or inspire performance.
4. **Meeting Mess** – many meetings start late, run overtime, lack structure, get off track, don't focus on top priorities, fail to document decisions and action plans, allow screen distractions, fall into group think, drive conflict underground, and overlook bad behavior.
5. **Upward Delegation** – many managers accept the monkey off the back of their direct reports and put it on their own by solving problems for them.
6. **Micromanagement** – frequent monitoring and follow ups can feel like "snooping," feeds The E-mail Beast, and transfers the monkey to the manager's back.
7. **No Time for Coaching** – managers who fail to invest in their coaching skill development and invest time in developing others are often overworked and overwhelmed with daily firefighting.
8. **Priority Overload** – new projects and initiatives are piled on top of overflowing workloads. Little time is spent pruning and prioritizing conflicting activities.
9. **Trivial Many vs. Vital Few** – when daily operations crowd out strategic time to reflect and refocus, minor and urgent issues overpower the major and important ones.

How many of these reasons apply to you or your leaders? What's needed is a time shift from technical and management to leadership. I discussed these and many other points in last month's webinar on **LeaderShift: Transforming Good Managers into Great Leaders**. Click on the link to view the archived webinar.

How "Bring Me Solutions, Not Problems" Causes Huge Problems

Putting **too many monkeys on his or her back** is a common frustration of many leaders. This happens when a team member approaches the leader with a problem or issue ("a monkey") and the leader adds it to the tribe of howling monkeys on his or her back.



In discussing "**monkey management**" methods, workshop/retreat participants will often declare that their approach is to tell team members "don't come to me with a problem, come to me with a solution." This not only makes the monkey problem worse, it encourages moose to move in as well. Moose-on-the-table, like elephant-in-the-room, is an issue or problem that's stifling communication and blocking a team's effectiveness (see a 77 second video explanation at "**Too Many Trips to the Zoo**").

Lazy leaders asking for solutions are rotten coaches. If difficult problems had obvious solutions life would be easier for everyone. Tough issues call for open discussion, root cause analysis, and brainstorming solutions. Putting two heads -- or a whole team -- together and following a structured inquiry and mutual learning process will lead to new and unexpected solutions.

We see the power of this time and again during leadership team "**moose hunting**" exercises. When the team process allows the most critical issues to be objectively (and often anonymously) put on the table for deeper probing and brainstorming the outcome is invariably different than most leaders expected.

In a recent two-day retreat, we hunted moose in an exercise that allowed team members to anonymously identify and vote on barriers/issues that will hold back progress toward the vision of their desired culture the day before. The team leader was surprised by what emerged and the depth of honest conversation and planning for change. Most participants agreed the team needed to find ways to regularly have these courageous conversations. They've been stuck in a pattern of the leader and a few stronger and more vocal VPs debating issues in familiar patterns while the majority of the team were spectators. New solutions and actions that hadn't been discussed before emerged for this process of discovery.

In his article, "**Bursting the CEO Bubble**," in this month's issue of *Harvard Business Review*, Hal Gregersen, executive director of the MIT Leadership Center, provides a series of questions to see if a leader is trapped in a bubble. A few critical ones get to the heart of effective coaching, monkey management, and reducing the moose:

- How many questions do you ask versus statements do you make in typical conversations?
- How often do you wait silently (three seconds or more) for others to answer your questions?
- How many times this week have you said "I don't know" in response to a question?
- When was the last time your provocative questions gave rise to a catalytic story -- one that radically transformed some part of your organization for the better?

Get out of the zoo. Don't fall into the bring-me-solutions trap. Develop your coaching skills and build a problem-solving culture to elevate your team's solution seeking effectiveness.

Archived Webinar: The Absolutely Vital Practice of Managers Giving Positive Feedback

Years ago, I reported to Harold, a leader who proudly described his MBE approach -- "management by exception." "If you haven't heard from me, that's a good sign," he explained. "That means I think you're doing just fine. I only deal with the exceptions. I look for problems and people that need correcting. Those are what I jump on."

Whenever I came back to my desk and had a phone message to call Harold my heart beat accelerated and jaw tightened like a vice. His approach made me and others feel criticized, often ignored, unappreciated and sometimes used. We felt like pieces of equipment or just another set of assets -- human resources -- wrapped in skin.



Organization consultant John Scherer called this approach "gap-zap." When things are going well, nothing is said - leaders leave a gap. When things get off track or there's a problem ...zap!

This approach is often very damaging in personal relationships. Over a beer one evening, Harold talked about his failed first marriage. "What really drove me crazy were her constant complaints that I never told her I loved her," he complained. "I married her didn't I? Obviously, I loved her. Why did I need to keep saying it then?"

Jack Zenger and Joe Folkman recently studied thousands of leaders on the impact of positive and corrective feedback. In their **45-minute webinar** they reported:

- 37% of leaders avoid giving positive feedback
- 63% of leaders have the strongest preference for giving negative feedback -- and think they're better at developing others
- The impact of leaders with a preference for giving positive feedback on developing others and their overall leadership effectiveness ratings
- The dangers of corrective feedback and barriers to giving it
- Who benefits most from receiving positive feedback
- Four key steps to giving effective positive feedback
- Recommendations and action plans for increasing positive feedback

To watch Jack and Joe's webinar click on ***The Absolutely Vital Practice of Managers Giving Positive Feedback***.

Watch the webinar to learn how to turn MBE into LBR -- "leadership by reinforcement" -- and leverage positivity to increase EEE -- energy, effort, and engagement.

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:

Insightful research providing practical steps to reduce the moose-on-the-table that reduce courageous conversations and block progress.

"6 Strategies for Creating a Candid Culture" -- Joe Folkman

www.forbes.com

"Searching through our databases I found a measure of candor from approximately 10,000 employees and discovered the enabling behaviors that are strongly correlated with candor."

Research showing the key characteristics found in most high potential leaders and a few vital skills that are often missed.

"Beware: All May Not Be Well With Your Company's High Potential Program" -- Jack Zenger

<http://www.forbes.com>

"We are concerned about the number of individuals currently in the Hi-Po programs of their organizations who don't really belong there. As a result, organizations may be investing their leadership development resources unwisely, while missing other candidates who have greater potential."

Drawing on data from over 7,000 employees Joe outlines practical steps that boosts extra effort and motivation.

"The 6 Key Secrets To Increasing Empowerment In Your Team" -- Joe Folkman

www.forbes.com

"Employees who felt a low level of empowerment were rated with engagement at the 24th percentile, whereas those with a high level of empowerment were at the 79th percentile. Clearly, empowerment counts."

A deeper look at four key reasons succession planning falls badly short in most organizations. Everyone loses.

"Companies Are Bad at Identifying High-Potential Employees" -- Jack Zenger and Joseph

Folkman, Harvard Business Review

<https://hbr.org>

"When we looked at the participants in the HIPO programs, 12% were in their organization's bottom quartile of leadership effectiveness. Overall, 42% were below average. That is a long way from the top 5% to which they supposedly belong."

Leaders need to stop the lazy and stifling practice of "bring me solutions not problems" and become better coaches.

"Don't Come to Me with a Problem!" -- Marshall Goldsmith, LinkedIn
www.linkedin.com

"This creates exactly the opposite of the environment an effective leader wants. If people have problems, you want to get them out on the table so you can help them find solutions."

Read *The Leader Letter* in Weekly Installments



The items in each month's issue of *The Leader Letter* are first published in my 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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