

THE LEADER LETTER

Leading with *STRENGTH*

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AUGUST 2013, ISSUE 125

This month is the first anniversary of our strategic partnership with Zenger Folkman. Last August I kicked off that inaugural partnership issue with excitement about "a new era beginning" and our first attendance at Zenger Folkman's 3rd Annual Extraordinary Leadership Summit at Sundance Ranch in Utah.



Discussion of a potential strategic partnership between The CLEMMER Group and Zenger Folkman started about 18 months ago in one of my periodic update discussions with Jack Zenger. Waaaay back in the day ... I was co-founder of The Achieve Group and began working with Jack in partnership with Zenger Miller in 1981. He became a role model, inspiration, and mentor. Although he doesn't have a snazzy cape, Jack is one of my leadership development superheroes!

As I've gotten to know Joe Folkman and others (like Chris Evans) at Zenger Folkman over the past year, I've been very impressed by the high quality and high values team he, Jack, and Bob Sherwin (he was CFO at Zenger Miller) have put together.

It's been a very busy and eventful year working with Zenger Folkman. But most of all it's been highly rewarding. Besides working with Jack Zenger again, one of the key reasons we've partnered with ZF is the leading edge work they're doing in the emerging field of strengths-based leadership development. I've long been a follower and written quite a bit about the burgeoning new field of Positive Psychology in my blogs and latest book, [Growing @ the Speed of Change](#). A strengths-based approach is rooted in optimism and builds a positive can-do culture.

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Another big attraction to working with Zenger Folkman is that their approaches use a much more scientific or evidence-based approach. Search Amazon for books with "leadership" in their title and you'll now find over 92,000 (that's up 10,000 since last August)! How many other books are about leadership but don't have that word in the title? Google "leadership books" and you'll get over 1.2 million hits! There are a slew of theories, opinions, arcane thesis papers, inspirational quotations, training programs, frameworks, and approaches to leadership. We need a research-based approach that cuts through this overwhelming noise to pinpoint what works.

The Extraordinary Coach development system has proven to be a powerful addition to Zenger Folkman's leadership development approaches. Well before our partnership, I read and reviewed Jack Zenger's book, [*The Extraordinary Coach: How the Best Leaders Help Others Grow*](#). In over three decades of work in this field I've read a lot of material -- and written quite a bit -- on coaching, growing, and developing others. I absolutely loved ***The Extraordinary Coach***. It's a unique combination of solid research, relevant and illustrative examples, with lots of practical how-to applications. Having now facilitated this powerful process I've been highly impressed by how quickly and effectively *The Extraordinary Coach* approach shifts thinking and provides powerful tools.

Last week we attended ZF's 4th Annual Extraordinary Leadership Summit in Park City -- one of Utah's top tourist destinations favored by entertainment stars during Robert Redford's Sundance Film Festival. If the past year wasn't enough, attending this Summit really underscored just how right the decision has been to form our partnership.

This issue is filled with further research, steps, and approaches to strengths-based leadership development. In my coming blogs I'll bring you the very latest we learned at the Summit.

In 2007 Jack, Joe, and Bob decided to grow from the small consultant practice they built over the past five years. In 2010 and 2011 they joined the ranks of the Top 20 Leadership Training Companies. And they've only just begun. We're now delighted to be "on the grow" together!

HOW ARE YOU STAYING SHARP, FOCUSED, AND PRODUCTIVE?

Jack Zenger's latest *Forbes* column brings to mind the ancient woodcutter's fable. A strong young pioneer is energetically chopping down trees with his broad axe to clear farming land. His productivity amazes and surpasses everyone else. As his axe dulls from heavy use his production drops while his frustration rises. A veteran community member working alongside him advises that if he stops to sharpen his axe his production will increase. "That will slow me down," he replies between heavy breaths. "I don't have time to sharpen my axe. I am too busy chopping trees."



Most managers quickly recognize how foolish that thinking is. Production managers know that regular maintenance is critical to keep equipment running at optimum levels. Yet, like the young woodcutter, too many leaders get caught up in the busyness trap and don't continually sharpen their leadership skills.

In "[Throw Your Old Plan Away: 6 New Ways To Build Leadership Development Into Your Job](#)" Jack provides these steps to stay sharp and productive:

1. Learn new information.
2. Build new relationships.
3. Organize colleagues who share a common interest.
4. Take time to plan and review your day.
5. Create feedback mechanisms for yourself.
6. Restructure your job.

Today's frenetic pace has trapped and stressed out far too many leaders. We need to step back to step ahead and to increase our effectiveness. An outstanding body of research was reported in *Harvard Business Review* a few years ago on this critical problem (see "[The Acceleration Trap: Frantic Busyness and Priority Overload is Overwhelming Way Too Many Teams and Organizations](#)"). A few readers added their insightful perspectives and advice in "[Reader Reflections on Frantic Busyness, Priority Overload, and The Acceleration Trap](#)".

We need to slow down in order to speed up (see "[Another Study on Slowing Down to Speed Up](#)" for supporting research). As I cited Attention Deficit Disorder expert, Edward Hallowell, in "[Reclaim Your Time, Reclaim Your Life](#)", "you can feel like a tin can surrounded by a hundred powerful magnets" pulling you in all directions at once.

Multi-tasking is like that young woodsman trying to swing a dull axe in each hand at two different trees at the same time. How are you staying sharp, focused, and productive?

MAKING YOURSELF INDISPENSABLE

In preparing for Zenger Folkman's Client conference in Park City, Utah, I reread ["Making Yourself Indispensable"](#) by Jack Zenger, Joe Folkman, and Scott Edinger published in *Harvard Business Review*. Reading this landmark article nearly two years ago was one of the key steps in taking a closer look at Zenger Folkman's revolutionary leadership development work and our decision to become their strategic partner last year.



["Making Yourself Indispensable"](#) succinctly summarizes Zenger Folkman's groundbreaking strengths-based research with practical advice on applying their findings. Woven throughout the article is an example of Tom, a midlevel executive struggling with how to improve his leadership from good to great. This will make him an exceptional leader -- and indispensable to his organization.

Here's some of the key findings and advice in the article:

- Moving from good to great leadership calls for a non-linear cross-training approach. This article is one of the only places Zenger Folkman's proprietary research is publicly mapped out for each of their 16 differentiating competencies.
- In the absence of a full 360 assessment, leaders can do an informal 360 by asking team members, colleagues, and their boss these questions: What leadership skills do you think are strengths for me? Is there anything I do that might be considered a fatal flaw --that could derail my career or lead me to fail in my current job if it's not addressed? What leadership ability, if outstanding, would have the most significant impact on the productivity or effectiveness of the organization? What leadership abilities of mine have the most significant impact on you?
- Exceptional leadership in the top 10% comes from elevating just five (any five) of the 16 competencies to a profound strength (90th percentile). Moving just one strength from good (75th percentile) to great (90th) boosts a leader's rated effectiveness from the bottom third to the top third.

- The best way to decide what leadership strength to develop is to align it with personal passions and the organization's need for that leader's role. The article provides the CPO (Competency, Passion, and Organizational Need) grid we use in *The Extraordinary Leader* workshop to do that.

The article concludes with this observation from the authors; "*Often executives complain to us that there are not enough good leaders in their organizations. We would argue that in fact **far too many leaders are merely good.** The challenge is not to replace bad leaders with good ones; it is to **turn people like Tom -- hardworking, capable executives who are reasonably good at their jobs -- into outstanding leaders with distinctive strengths.***"

["Making Yourself Indispensable"](#) summarizes much of what we cover in *The Extraordinary Leader Development System*. Read it for an evidence-based map to indispensable, exceptional, or extraordinary leadership.

HOW TO BECOME THE INDISPENSABLE LEADER

At the time that the above article appeared in *Harvard Business Review*, executive coach and bestselling author, Marshall Goldsmith, interviewed Jack Zenger in his *Huffington Post* blog.

Read the interview at "[The Indispensable Leader](#)" for Jack's insights on these questions Marshall posed:



- Most people tend to think of "improvement" as fixing weaknesses. Why is it so important for leaders to build strengths instead of focusing on shortcomings?
- You mention that the process of building strengths is different than that of fixing weaknesses. How so?
- Can you give an example of a leadership strength and how competency companions could help build that strength?
- Your research shows that an individual is the worst at knowing their own strengths and weaknesses, so how do you get a more accurate picture of yourself?
- Once you've identified which competencies are your strengths, how do you choose which one to develop? How do the competency companions play in to your development plan?
- Why does developing strengths make you "indispensable"?

["The Indispensable Leader"](#) is a very insightful piece that I highly recommend you read for insights on building extraordinary leadership skills. As Jack points out "it is the leader with a handful of strengths who is making the most important contributions to the organization. Think of every objective measure of organizational performance that you can -- whether it is employee turnover, customer satisfaction, employee commitment, productivity, innovation, or net profitability. In every case the differences are not slight, they are huge ... These are the leaders who no organization wants to lose. They are the ones who top management and the front-line workers see as being truly indispensable."

THOUGHTS THAT MAKE YOU GO HMMM ON ... SYNERGISTIC OPPOSITES

Joe Folkman's latest *Forbes* column, ["Exceptional Leaders: Are they the Friend or the Enemy?"](#), provides yet more of his research on the incredible multiplying power of leaders who are BOTH likable and demanding. Finding synergy where others see contradictions is proving to be a key element in highly effective leadership.



"The opposite of a correct statement is a false statement. But the opposite of a profound truth may well be another profound truth."

- Niels Bohr, Danish physicist winner of the Nobel Prize for Physics

"Visionary companies do not brutalize themselves with the "Tyranny of the OR" -- the purely rational view that says you can have either A OR B, but not both ... instead, they embrace the "Genius of the AND" -- the paradoxical view that allows them to pursue both A AND B at the same time. "

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

"The test of first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still be able to function."

- F. Scott Fitzgerald, American novelist

" ... we researched the performance of more than 1,000 companies worldwide over the past two decades ... the companies that performed best adopted a very different approach. Instead of setting a lead objective, they looked at

how best to strengthen what the two sides of each tension have in common."

- Dominic Dodd and Ken Favaro, "Managing the Right Tension," *Harvard Business Review*

"After extensive interviews with more than 50 (effective leaders) the author discovered that most are integrative thinkers -- that is, they can hold in their heads two opposing ideas at once and then come up with a new idea that contains elements of each but is superior to both ... this process of consideration and synthesis ... is the hallmark of exceptional businesses and the people who run them. They see the whole problem and how the parts fit together ... they creatively resolve the tensions between opposing ideas and generate new alternatives."

- Roger Martin, "How Successful Leaders Think," *Harvard Business Review*

".... performance and health are both things you should be managing today. Just as performance requires a quarter-by-quarter, month-by-month, day-by-day focus from leaders, so does health. Sometimes people equate health with the long term (something to manage tomorrow) and performance with the short term (something to manage today). This thinking couldn't be more flawed. Our research shows that the way you manage your health today is responsible for at least 50 percent of your ability to continue to perform in the future. "

- Scott Keller and Colin Price, *Beyond Performance: How Great Organizations Build Ultimate Competitive Advantage*

Further Reading:

- ["Demanding Leaders are Much More Effective – and More Likable"](#)
- ["Dispelling Common Myths about Likability and Leadership Effectiveness"](#)
- ["Are the Most Effective Leaders Loved or Feared?"](#)
- ["7 Steps to Higher Likability – and Results"](#)
- ["Powerful Combinations: Drive for Results and Builds Relationships"](#)

CAN A STRENGTH BECOME A WEAKNESS?

Our work with strengths-based leadership development over the past year has been highly rewarding and sometimes frustrating. It's rewarding to watch workshop participants connect with the idea of building on their natural strengths. Once most people see the deep and compelling research and think about the personal motivation for growth and development that comes from building on strengths rather than focusing on weaknesses, it clicks and they "get it."



What's frustrating is the enduring power of "the dark side" -- focusing on weaknesses -- to pull us away from building our strengths. We're so deeply socialized to equate improvement with closing gaps and fixing weaknesses. This is, for example, the very foundation of most training needs analysis and performance appraisals.

As the strengths-based leadership development revolution picks up momentum and increases visibility, another way "the dark side" beckons is through the misconception that overusing a strength can turn it into a weakness. The root of this misunderstanding is the definition of a strength.

In their latest *Harvard Business Review* blog, "[Three Myths About Your Strengths](#)" Jack Zenger and Joe Folkman show how the confusion stems from the associated behavior, not the strength itself:

"The distinction becomes easier to see if you ask yourself a question like, 'Can an executive be excessively honest?' Those who think so might fear too much honesty would lead someone to be overly blunt or boorish. That may be so, but it's not inevitable, and it's boorishness and bluntness that would then be the problem, not honesty in itself."

Another strengths myth Jack and Joe address is that strengths and weaknesses go together as a matched set. This is the belief that people with towering strengths inevitably have gaping weaknesses or counterbalancing flaws. I wonder if this mistaken belief is further reinforced by the very public crashing and burning we see of a few highly talented entertainers or athletes like Michael Jackson, Lance Armstrong, or Tiger Woods.

"[Three Myths About Your Strengths](#)" has a chart with fascinating research Zenger Folkman just completed on whether strengths come with flaws:

"The short answer is no. Analysis of 360-degree evaluations of the leadership abilities of more than 16,000 executives shows that less than 10% of them who display even one outstanding strength also possessed any fatal flaws."

The research is clear and unequivocal; elevating our natural strengths from good to great always leads to much higher leadership effectiveness. Don't be seduced by the dark side of focusing on weaknesses. May The Force (of strengths) be with you!

ON LOVE, FEAR, AND BUILDING STRENGTHS

In response to my recent post "[Are the Most Effective Leaders Loved or Feared?](#)" I received this e-mail from Becky, RN BSN Quality Improvement Coordinator:



*"I love the fear and love regarding leaders that you posted. I am reminded of Jampolsky's book, **"Love is Letting Go of Fear"** that I once read with its inspiration and recommended often.*

*My experience has shown that **warmth will get you everywhere ... being real is what people relate to**, without the need to be the expert at everything. One can always research for clarification.*

Allowing staff to grow and offering responsibility -- recognizing the strengths of others -- builds character, dedication, and loyalty and will turn out leaders to which you may silently smile to yourself that you just might have had something to do with that! I say that a great leader is one who can go on vacation and come back to a clean desk having staff with problem-solving skills and the ability to replace you! "

Becky has packed many key leadership truths in her short comment. Here are a few thoughts she triggered:

- Becky's comment that "warmth will get you everywhere" has a scientific base as shown in "[Demanding Leaders Are Much More Effective - and More Likable](#)".
- Being real is at the heart of strengths-based leadership development. Leaders are much more effective when building on natural strengths rather than focusing on weakness and trying to change who they really are.

- Going on vacation and coming back to a clean desk is a good test of a leader's ability to develop a team who owns and solves problems rather than the leader defining his or her job as the chief problem solver. See "[Breaking the Manager-Employee Dependence Spin Cycle](#)", "[How Many Monkeys Are On Your Back?](#)" and "[Monkey Management: Creating Empowerment and Growth](#)".
- Fear and courage is a key theme of my book, [Moose on the Table: A Novel Approach to Communications @ Work](#). At the time of the book's publication, I blogged "[Courage is at the Core of Leadership](#)". These themes were explored further in "[Thoughts That Make You Go Hmmm on ... Courageous Conversations](#)" and "[A Kid Gives a Lesson in Courageous Leadership](#)".

In a follow up e-mail Becky explained that her company was just purchased. Everyone is now waiting to see who will have jobs and who won't. She writes, *"Let's see about practicing what I preach. Others seem to be more concerned than me. I see an open door if this one closes ... **every thought today creates tomorrow's reality ... mine isn't fear filled.**"*

7 STEPS TO HIGHER LIKABILITY - AND RESULTS

Over the past few months we've been writing about the profound payoffs of leader likability. Our research clearly shows that likability correlates directly with a leader's effectiveness and the results he or she produces (see "[Demanding Leaders Are Much More Effective - and More Likable](#)").



So how can a leader increase his or her likability -- and effectiveness? In his *Forbes* column on the topic Jack Zenger provides these seven steps from a study he and Joe Folkman did of 360 data from more than 51,000 leaders:

1. Increase positive emotional connections with others.
2. Display rock solid integrity.
3. Cooperate with others.
4. Be a coach, mentor, and teacher.
5. Be an inspiration.
6. Be visionary and future focused.
7. Ask for feedback and make an effort to change.

Read Jack's column, "[The Unlikable Leader: 7 Ways to Improve Employee/Boss Relationships.](#)" for a brief description of each step.

In his book, *Working with Emotional Intelligence*, researcher, Daniel Goleman, reports on similar results:

"...an analysis of the power of a leader to set a positive -- or negative -- emotional tone in an organization was undertaken within the U.S. Navy, where the standards for superior performance are cut-and-dried: Annual awards are given to the most efficient, safest, and most prepared squadrons. In an extensive comparison of superior and just-average commands, a striking difference in the emotional tone the commanding officers set was revealed. The very best commands, it turned out, were run not by Captain Ahab types who terrorized their crews, but by, well, nice guys.

The superior leaders managed to balance a people-oriented personal style with a decisive command role."

Combining this research with a study just published this month in *Harvard Business Review* (see ["Are the Most Effective Leaders Loved or Feared"](#)) the cynical cliché "nice guys finish last" is wrong. Nice leaders -- who also drive for results -- finish first.

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:

Joe draws from our database of over 300,000 leaders to determine the behaviors of leaders in the 90th percentile for concern and consideration.

["Did I Offend You? The Science Behind Being Polite"](#) -

Joe Folkman

www.forbes.com

"People can't and won't respect your intentions until your consideration for them as individuals rings true."

Using powerful questions to shift this ratio is a major learning many participants take from our Extraordinary Coach workshops.

["Telling vs. Teaching: Great Leaders Know the Difference"](#) - Jessica Stillman
www.inc.com

"The best leaders spend five times more time teaching with questions than telling people what to do. What's your ratio?"

Our research shows the best leaders double satisfaction with pay and job security versus the worst leaders.

["Top 10 Hiring Mistakes, #9: When It's All About the Money"](#) - Joel Peterson, Chairman, JetBlue Airways
www.linkedin.com

"Organizations made up of people who chose their jobs based on the highest salaries are miserable places to work. They're often full of petty jealousies and politics, and hostile to new hires."

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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