

# THE LEADER LETTER

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## AUGUST 2014, ISSUE 137

Our Business Development Director, Brad Smith, and I just returned from an intensive week in Park City, Utah. This idyllic setting in the mountains above Salt Lake City is famous for its natural beauty, numerous ski hills and resorts, and the Sundance Film Festival.

We didn't have much time to enjoy this beautiful location with an action packed schedule that included Zenger Folkman's Annual Extraordinary Leadership Summit, International Strategic Partners conference (which included updates to ZF's [programs and services](#)), and certification in our newest coaching program, *Elevating Feedback*. We also heard presentations on leadership development using ZF's programs and services from Sony Computer Entertainment, DirectTV, Renault, Celgene, and the State of Minnesota.

We came away with extensive notes, many insights, and personal skill development. As we continue digesting and preparing to implement some of what we learned, here are a few key points that stand out:

- The most powerful leadership development is based on data and connects the approaches used to profitability, sales, turnover, engagement, safety, productivity. If those don't improve we're squandering dollars and wasting everyone's time.
- Strengths-based leadership development is now being used by the biggest companies in automotive, financial services, telecom and other industries because they've rigorously tested this ground



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breaking approach against traditional competency and 360-based approaches focused on fixing weaknesses.

- Getting senior executives to actively lead and even deliver leadership development programs has a powerful impact.
- Interest in, and application of, coaching skills is growing rapidly. But most approaches don't have a measureable impact and aren't based on research.
- Talent management is becoming a vital issue as retirements loom and organizations grow. Leading companies are stepping up their high potential programs, creating "Talent Dashboards," revamping career/performance management, and focusing on developing non-management but highly valuable individual performers.
- People crave meaning in their work. Highly engaged employees feel a deep connection to a higher organizational purpose.
- Research shows there are six different ways to inspire and motivate that needs to match a leadership strengths and authentic style.

In this issue you'll find video clips, research, a new white paper, self-assessment, probing questions, and a book review with excerpts related to many of these themes.

May you find a few leadership lessons to help in scaling your leadership summit.

### VIDEO CLIP: TOWERING STRENGTHS OVERSHADOW WEAKNESSES

As I outlined in "[Exceptional Leaders Aren't Well Rounded](#)" and "[Outstanding Major League Baseball Players Aren't Well Rounded](#)" extraordinary leaders aren't defined by the absence of weaknesses but the presence of a few profound strengths. In [The Extraordinary Leader](#) workshop we help participants uncover the power of leadership perception from their own experiences with a simple Best Leader/Worst Leader exercise.



Click on [Towering Strengths Overshadow Weaknesses](#) for my three minute video clip explaining the essence of this exercise.

Even the greatest leaders have weaknesses. Think of historically great leaders like Churchill, Gandhi, Kennedy, Lincoln and the like. These were not perfect human beings. Many had big weaknesses. We outlined more recent examples in "[Steve Jobs Showed How Towering Strengths Overshadow Weaknesses](#)".

Despite the growing evidence and our own experiences, building on strengths is a counterintuitive way to develop leadership skills. Many leadership development approaches have big "[Struggles with Wasting Time on Weaknesses](#)".

## **AN OVERVIEW OF KEY INSIGHTS FROM THE EXTRAORDINARY LEADER**

Zenger Folkman's foundational research and approach is [The Extraordinary Leader](#) named after their highly acclaimed and bestselling book by the same title. Recently we published a white paper detailing these key insights from this seminal publication and body of work:



1. Great leaders make a huge difference, when compared with merely good leaders.
2. One organization can have many great leaders.
3. We have been aiming too low in our leadership development activities.
4. The relationship between improved leadership and increased performance outcomes is neither precisely incremental nor is it linear.
5. Great leadership consists of processing several "building blocks" of capabilities, each complimenting the others.
6. Leadership culminates in championing change.
7. All competencies are not equal. Some differentiate good from great leaders, whereas others do not.
8. Leadership competencies are linked closely together.
9. Effective leaders have widely different styles. There is no one right way to lead.
10. Effective leadership practices are specific to an organization.
11. The key to developing great leadership is to build strengths.
12. Powerful combinations produce nearly exponential results.
13. Greatness is not caused by the absence of weakness.
14. Great leaders are not perceived as having major weaknesses.
15. Fatal flaws must be fixed.
16. Leadership attributes are often developed in non-obvious ways.
17. Leaders are made, not born.
18. Leaders can improve their leadership effectiveness through self-development.
19. The organization, with a person's immediate boss, provides significant assistance in developing leadership.
20. The quality of leadership in an organization seldom exceeds that of the person at the top.

[Click here](#) to download a complimentary copy of [An Overview of Key Insights from The Extraordinary Leader](#) and read more about these points. Canadian readers can find links to purchase discounted copies of *The Extraordinary Leader: Turning Good Managers into Great Leaders* from McGraw Hill through our [book store](#). It's also available as an e-book from Amazon, Apple, and other retailers.

## TALENT MANAGEMENT AND GLOBAL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Talent Management including succession planning, developing high potentials, and attracting and retaining top people is now a critical issue. During the financial crisis and economic downturn of the last few years, organizations slowed or stopped leadership development. As executives now face a wave of retiring Baby Boomers and take a longer term view, "leadership bench strength" has become a choking constraint to organizational growth.



We've recently published a Zenger Folkman white paper on Global Leadership Development. The paper reports on one of our studies on the topic that looked at senior executives rated in the 90th percentile in the globe perspective. The factors that most differentiated these top leaders from their peers were strategic perspective, customer focus and understanding, spotting trends, engaged team, willingness to take risks, and deep knowledge and expertise.

Whether developing local or global leaders, these skills align with Talent Management best practices in developing future leaders for more senior leadership roles. The steps for implementing a long-term global leadership development strategy also apply across the range of Talent Management approaches:

- Create a new mindset and awareness among the senior leadership team.
- Establish a new culture and context that will support the creation of global leaders.
- Identify the unique capabilities required of a global leader for your organization.
- Begin developing future global leaders early in their careers.
- Utilize the most proven development techniques.
- Devise ways to better identify global leadership potential.

A key factor that's emerged from this and our previous research is the need to develop leaders much earlier in their careers. As outlined in this white paper, more than three-quarters of managers don't get any formal



leadership development in their first position. Many don't get leadership training until they've been in leadership roles for over ten years.

[Click here](#) to download a complimentary copy of Global Leadership Development.

In our CLEMMER Group planning session last week we recognized just how vital Talent Management is becoming. We're planning a series of webinars, executive briefings, and workshops to address this issue in the next six months. Watch this space for details and how you can participate.

## WHAT'S YOUR COACHING STYLE?

["Do You Have What It Takes to be a Good Coach?"](#) showed our research on the connection between coaching effectiveness and employee commitment. This blog also provides a link to [take a coaching evaluation](#) to see how you compare to outstanding coaches. This follows from Jack Zenger and Joe Folkman's recent webinar on becoming a better coach. [Click here](#) to view the webinar.



In their *Harvard Business Review* blog, [Most Managers Think of Themselves as Coaches](#), Jack and Joe report on the results of the survey completed by over 2,000 readers. The survey measured three styles on a scale of coaching versus directive leadership:

- Collaboration over giving direction
- Acting as an equal rather than an expert
- Prefers discovery to giving advice

Three-quarters of survey respondents preferred to use a coaching approach rather than directive leadership. Top managers expressed the strongest desire to be collaborative and supervisors were the lowest. This aligns with how many supervisors -- often mistakenly -- believe their role is controlling, directing, and problem solving daily operations. Many haven't seen any other leadership style or been trained how to be effective coaches.

This survey was based on self-assessment. And there's often a big gap between knowing what leadership or coaching style is most effective and doing it. Our 360 assessment data consistently shows that self-perceptions are only half as predictive of results like engagement, customer service, safety, profitability, etc. as the perceptions of direct reports, manager(s), peers, and others. One reason for that is that we assess ourselves by our intentions whereas everyone else can only rate our behavior.

What's your coaching style preference? What kind of coaching behaviors does everyone see from you? How do you know?

## WHY DO YOU WANT TO LEAD?

Research shows that extraordinary leaders are made not born. Ultimately it boils down to motivation. How much does a leader want to move their skills from good to great?

Perhaps an even more important question is why. Why do you want to lead?



I recently came across *Harvard Business School* professor Bill George's article on [Why Leaders Lose Their Way](#). His observations and advice along with dozens of reader comments provides a thought provoking look at the critical why question:

- Leaders who lose their way are often good people who lose their moral bearings.
- Before moving into leadership we should ask ourselves "what's the purpose of my leadership?" Finding the answers could take decades.
- The most enduringly effective leadership goes beyond power, prestige, and money to "a deeper desire to serve something greater than oneself."
- When leaders lose sight of their inner satisfaction they lose their grounding and cut off honest dialogue and feedback.
- Leaders need to "true north" themselves by reframing their leadership toward serving those they lead and making meaningful contributions.
- Leaders often need spouses/partners, mentors, coaches, or others who aren't impressed by their titles, prestige or wealth to help them stay grounded and avoid losing their authenticity.

This is very consistent with Joseph Campbell's immense body of research and extensive writing on mythology. His life work focused on the many similarities and consistent patterns found in mythical stories of heroes who've inspired and guided countless societies across the ages and around the world. In his PBS TV series of interviews with journalist Bill Moyers captured in *The Power of Myth* Campbell states, "if you realize what the real problem is -- losing yourself, giving yourself to some higher end, or to another -- you realize that this itself is the ultimate trial. When we quit thinking primarily about ourselves and our own self-preservation, we undergo a truly heroic transformation of consciousness."

## AN HILARIOUS ILLUSTRATION OF HOW PERCEPTIONS OF FAIRNESS AND EQUALITY ARE RELATIVE

As part of a larger culture development effort, we've worked with dozens of executive teams over the years to articulate or revise their core values. An almost universal core value is some variation of respect, integrity, or equality, or fairness.



Whether our espoused or aspirational values become the real or lived values to everyone inside an organization is all about perception. That's especially true with equality or fairness. How does the individual or team feel they're dealt with relative to how others are treated is the critical question.

So I might be perfectly fine with my current pay and benefits package as I see it as fair compensation for the work I do. But if someone else is doing the same job and getting paid more my perception of fairness and equality will change. I am no longer OK with my compensation. I may even feel exploited and come to resent how I am being treated.

A very funny two and a half minute clip from Frans de Waal's TED talk shows an experiment when [Two Monkeys Were Paid Unequally](#). This humorously illustrates how commonly we decide on the fairness of how we're treated by comparing with how peers or others are dealt with.

We often judge others by their actions and ourselves by our intentions. But as the French writer, Antoine de Saint Exupery, once pointed out "the meaning of things lies not in the things themselves, but in our attitude towards them." Most leaders strive to be fair and equal. We need to find ways to continually get feedback and understand how those we lead perceive how they're treated relative to others.

## IS YOUR LEADERSHIP AUDIO IN SYNC WITH YOUR VIDEO ?

It's really annoying to watch a video with the audio slightly out of sync. Too often this is what people see from their leaders in matching their behaviors to their bold proclaimed core values.



Here are a few examples of how leaders in extraordinary organizations ensure they're role models of the organization's values:

- The CEO of a contact lens manufacturer begins each executive team meeting with a report from each executive on what they have personally done to advance the service/quality improvement effort in the past two weeks. This includes such activities as senior vice presidents leading major process improvement initiatives, CEO lunches for top performers, each executive calling at least three customers a week who've experienced a problem, and executives kicking off every one of the dozens of service/quality introductory education and awareness sessions running throughout the company.
- One executive team realized the "humorous" barbs VP's were throwing at each other had become a thinly disguised form of "sniping" that rippled through the organization with departments taking shots at each other as well. To give the "sniper" feedback and help form more constructive team patterns, executives now clang a pen on their water glasses or coffee cups whenever one executive "snipes" at another team member.
- A fine-paper manufacturer, a large hospital, a producer of medical devices, and a federal government department demonstrated their clear commitment to development by making the budgets for these efforts "sacred and off-limits" during painful budget cuts.
- To dramatize the importance of clean bus depot restrooms, the president of a bus line warned his managers he would drop into any depot on an hour's notice and dine in the washroom. Within weeks he was getting photos of managers dining in spotless washrooms.
- Executives at an insurance company developed their own unique approach to "management by wandering around" and signaling called PEET -- Program to Ensure that Everybody's Thanked. Each of the fifteen executives receives a monthly PEET sheet, which lists the names and leader of three they are to visit to discuss the core values. After the visit, the executive notes the visit's highlights and sends the PEET sheet to Culture Team Central. A monthly summary of highlights and trends is compiled and circulated to the executive team.
- Senior executives are the instructors for major coaching and team leadership skills development efforts that equip every manager and supervisor to live the new culture.
- A high tech manufacturer was running at capacity to meet escalating demand. One of their hottest products was slightly off specifications, yet the desperate customer said he would take them anyway. But the plant manager refused to ship a product that wasn't up to standard. The CEO reports "It took about five seconds for the people in the plant to understand that he was serious about quality. Those are the things that have to happen because people are always asking, 'What do you want? Quality or profit?' The answer is 'Both!'"
- Executives of a clothing manufacturer spend one Saturday a month on the sales floor of major retail outlets selling their

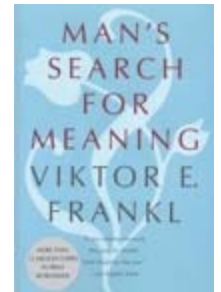


products. "It's quite an eye-opener to sell our own brand and watch people decide to buy other people's clothing," says one senior manager.

Do the people you're leading feel your values rhetoric matches your leadership reality? What's your feedback loop and do you know whether they feel your video is synced with your audio?

### **BOOK REVIEW: *MAN'S SEARCH FOR MEANING* BY VIKTOR FRANKL**

I often find biographies of accomplished leaders or thought pioneers inspiring and instructive. Having read the Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist, Viktor Frankl's, classic book, *Man's Search for Meaning* years ago I recently came across his autobiography *Viktor Frankl Recollections*. I enjoyed reading about his story and it drew me back to reread *Man's Search for Meaning*. *Meaning* is far more inspiring and relevant than his meandering, disconnected, and poorly written autobiography. Maybe something was lost in translation.



The first part of *Man's Search for Meaning* focuses on the horrific ordeals he suffered in Nazi concentration camps of the Second World War. He witnessed humankind at its very worst and its very best. After suffering severe starvation, beatings, back-breaking labor, freezing temperatures with no shoes or warm clothing, and nearly being sent to the gas chambers a few times, he emerged at the end of the war to learn most of his family including his wife had been killed.

The second part of his book outlines the thinking that kept him from joining the many prisoners who died of despair or committed suicide in the camps. In an inspiring example of turning tragedy into triumph Frankl emerged to find a new form of psychotherapy called "logotherapy." Logos is a Greek word denoting "meaning."

Building on Nietzsche's words, "he who has a why to live for can bear with almost any how," Frankl advises "we can discover this meaning in life in three different ways: (1) by creating a work or doing a deed; (2) by experiencing something or encountering someone; and (3) by the attitude we take toward unavoidable suffering."

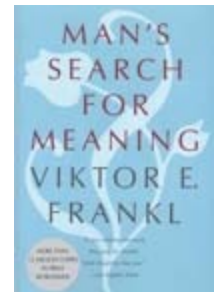
This search for meaning is very consistent with the most recent research on positive psychology as outlined by the movement's founder, Martin Seligman, in his book [\*Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-Being\*](#), "Human beings, ineluctably, want meaning and purpose in life. The Meaningful Life consists in belonging to and serving something that you believe is bigger than the self."

A key part of logotherapy that Frankl first practiced in the Nazi death camps was focusing on the future through visioning or positive imagery. He imagined himself speaking in a lecture hall about his experiences and sharing the key lessons he learned to help others alleviate their suffering.

A major message woven through Frankl's powerful personal example and this book is that life is all about choice. It's not what happens to us as much as what we do about it.

### **THOUGHTS THAT MAKE YOU GO HMMM FROM.... *MAN'S SEARCH FOR MEANING* BY VIKTOR FRANKL**

"...everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms -- to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."



"...the sort of person the prisoner became was the result of an inner decision, and not the result of camp influences alone. Fundamentally, therefore, any man can, even under such circumstances, decide what shall become of him - mentally and spiritually. He may retain his human dignity even in a concentration camp."

"Under the same conditions, those who were oriented toward the future, toward a meaning that waited to be fulfilled -- these persons were more likely to survive. Nardini and Lifton, two American military psychiatrists, found the same to be the case in the prisoner-of-war camps in Japan and Korea."

"One could make a victory of those experiences, turning life into an inner triumph, or one could ignore the challenge and simply vegetate."

"What man actually needs is not a tensionless state but rather the striving and struggling for a worthwhile goal, a freely chosen task. What he needs is not the discharge of tension at any cost but the call of a potential meaning waiting to be fulfilled by him."

"Man's search for meaning is the primary motivation in his life and not a "secondary rationalization" of instinctual drives. This meaning is unique and specific in that it must and can be fulfilled by him alone; only then does it achieve a significance which will satisfy his own will to meaning."

"As each situation in life represents a challenge to man and presents a problem for him to solve, the question of the meaning of life may actually be reversed. Ultimately, man should not ask what the meaning of his life is, but rather he must recognize that it is he who is asked. In a word, each man is questioned by life; and he can only answer to life by answering for his own life; to life he can only respond by being responsible."

## 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:

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!

A summary of research now available in Jack's new whitepaper on Global Leadership Development.

" [The 6 Competencies Global Leaders Need To Succeed](#)" -- Jack Zenger  
[www.forbes.com](http://www.forbes.com)

*"What competencies do global leaders need to acquire? In a study of 108 senior executives my colleague Joe Folkman and I identified those who were rated at the 90th percentile in their global perspective."*

Trying to figure out who provided low survey ratings or made negative comments dulls the rich learning leaders can take from feedback.

" [Who Done It: The Danger Of Assigning Ownership To Anonymous Feedback](#)" -- Joe Folkman  
[www.forbes.com](http://www.forbes.com)

*"When people receive anonymous 360 feedback there is a natural human tendency to look at the data and attempt to figure out 'who done it?'"*

A further look at, and opportunity for self-assessment on, ZF's research around the three key attributes of extraordinary coaches.

["Do You Want To Coach Others? Most Likely, Yes" --](#)  
Joe Folkman  
[www.forbes.com](http://www.forbes.com)

*"There are three fundamental attributes that are correlated with being an effective coach. I would like to give you the opportunity to test yourself in these areas and see where you stand in comparison to the data set I share in this blog."*

## READ THE LEADER LETTER IN TWICE WEEKLY INSTALLMENTS

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## 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](mailto: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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