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The Leader Letter



When our son Chris was home from university to celebrate his 22nd birthday, he and I had a conversation about how much more complex, nuanced, and interesting the world has become for him than when he was a teenager. During his teenage years, the world, and most of the people he encountered in it, could be easily divided into right and wrong, stupid and smart, good and bad, or cool and not cool. With his interest in politics, we had many ideological debates about the social and political issues of the day. He had strong beliefs and clear answers for just about every situation. I often argued both sides of an issue -- even the side I didn't believe in -- to try to help him understand that it wasn't that black and white.

Chris's major in his first year at university was "political science." He had failed to find the humor in me calling "political science" an oxymoron. At the time of this discussion, he was in his third year and had to write papers arguing both sides of issues, even presenting the opposite side to his own belief. He had become more tolerant and understanding of the world's subtleties and complexities. In other words, he had grown up.

There are clearly times when we do need to take a stand and draw a firm line between what we see as right and wrong or moral and immoral. Hiding behind ambiguity or waffling on our position can be a sign of low integrity and a lack of leadership. But the capacity to live in the grey zone between black and white is a sign of maturity. A great deal of destruction and disaster in organizations, relationships, families, religions, and throughout societies comes from the intolerance and inflexibility of immature "leaders" who believe there are clear right and wrong answers to just about every situation. Their harsh and judgmental positions usually come from a place of fear and insecurity.

Leadership development provides many examples of balancing sometimes opposing approaches to create a powerful combination. The new research on Bold Leadership as outlined in this issue is a great example. So is balancing life in the fast lane with slow country back roads, how towering strengths can overcome weaknesses, building leadership development on the job, and using 360 assessments for both performance management and personal development.

May you find the right shades of grey to strengthen your leadership effectiveness!

7 Keys to Leading Change



Change isn't news. But the continually accelerating pace of organizational change is. People feel inundated, overwhelmed, and stressed. Adaptive organizations provide inspiration and practical tools to everyone in order to help deal with our rapid pace of change and uncertainty.

Our turbulent times have created waves of fear, frustration, and uncertainty. When these negative forces flood through the workplace, they often wash away morale and motivation.

It's impossible to predict where all this change is taking us. But one thing is certain -- the pace of change is not likely to slow down any time soon. To thrive in turbulent times, organizations must change perceptions and behaviors to change results.

Recently Zenger Folkman reviewed the ratings of 2,852 direct reports of 559 leaders across 49 behaviors. These assessments included the leader's effectiveness at leading change. ZF's analysis of the results uncovered two ineffective behaviors. The first finding was that warm and positive relationships don't bring about effective change. The second insight showed that nagging with incessant requests, suggestions, and advice is highly annoying and irritates rather than leads change.

As outlined in their latest *Harvard Business Review* blog, "**7 Things Leaders Do to Help People Change,**" Zenger Folkman uncovered key behaviors to leading change. You might use this ranked ordered checklist to assess your change leadership efforts:

1. **Inspiring others** – pulling rather than pushing others to be energized by the changes, make emotional connections, and rousing desire to change rather than stoking fear.
2. **Noticing problems** – recognize problems and anticipate issues to be addressed.
3. **Providing a clear goal** – getting everyone focused on the top priorities and change strategies.
4. **Challenging standard approaches** – maneuvering around old practices and policies and sometimes pushing back on outdated rules.
5. **Building trust in your judgment** – improving your judgment and other's perception of it through collecting data and seeking opinions and advice.
6. **Having courage** – this often means changing processes, reorganizing, having difficult conversations, providing redirecting feedback, and taking bold actions.
7. **Making change a top priority** – clearing away competing priorities and focusing on the change effort.

I've written extensively about leading change. Click on Change Management **blogs** and **articles** to browse a collection of perspectives on this vital leadership topic.

Attributes of Cynical and High Service/Quality Cultures

"I owe, I owe, so off to work I go." "Work sucks, but I need the bucks."
"I'd rather be fishing/sailing/golfing/..."

Surveys show that these phrases express the feelings of a growing number of frontline performers today. Too often these contagious feelings spread throughout a team or organization. How many of these attributes of cynical cultures are found in your workplace:



1. High "snicker factor" about values
2. Declining engagement levels
3. Rising absenteeism
4. Higher turnover
5. Declining Customer satisfaction
6. Resistance to change
7. Low trust and teamwork
8. Decline in quality
9. Lower health and safety

Earlier this year I reconnected with **Paul Levesque**. Back in the days of The Achieve Group, Paul was a key developer of our **Three Rings of Perceived Value** model. He was also part of the team that developed Achieve's implementation framework documented in ***Firing on All Cylinders: The Service/Quality System for High-Powered Corporate Performance***.

In June, he and I delivered a joint session with a Client around leading a high service/quality culture. Paul's books, articles, and workshops evolving and advancing our earlier work were extremely powerful.

To reverse and re-energize cynical cultures Paul has developed a step-by-step methodology built around these key attributes of high service/quality cultures:

1. Work is made to feel more like play.
2. There's a single, primary objective with an external focus.
3. Employees voluntarily embrace involvement and ownership.

You can find more on these approaches and how they fit into our updated implementation framework in my June webcast **Leading a Peak Performance Culture**.

7 Steps to Building Bolder (and dramatically more effective) Leaders



Are the leaders in your organization timid or bold? What is bold leadership? How does it differ from timid leadership? How much of a difference does bold leadership make?

Zenger Folkman recently studied 360-degree reports on more than 50,000 leaders in all industries and from all parts of the world. This new research identified leaders who exhibit bold behaviors contrasted to their timid (and much less effective) counterparts. Bold leaders produced dramatically higher results in every measure of organizational and performance outcomes.

This info graphic summarizes the key findings:

BOLD LEADERSHIP

Probability of an extraordinary leader possessing good judgment, but a weakness in boldness.

1%

Probability of an extraordinary leader possessing boldness, but a weakness in good judgment.

4%

Probability of an extraordinary leader possessing BOTH good judgment and boldness.

96%

Results based on 57,137 leaders Zenger Folkman global database

WHAT MAKES A **BOLD** LEADER?

1. Challenges standard approaches
2. Creates an atmosphere of continual improvement
3. Does everything possible to achieve goals
4. Gets others to go beyond what they originally thought possible
5. Energizes others to take on challenging goals
6. Quickly recognizes situations where change is needed
7. Has the courage to make needed changes

TIMID LEADERS

Tend to "Push" more than "Pull"

Focus their attention on internal issues or problems

Assume that others understand the strategy and don't need to be reminded

Often have the attitude of "If it ain't broke don't try to fix it"

BOLD LEADERS

"Push" and "Pull" by finding ways to inspire and motivate others to embrace goals and promote investment into outcomes

Are always looking outside the organization to understand customer needs, competitors, and global issues

Constantly reminds others of the vision, and what they need to do to reach the objective

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ZF's research also found:

- Three vital competencies that support and reinforce bold leadership
- Significant differences between countries and cultures in encouraging and reinforcing bold leadership
- Surprising differences between males and females in bold leadership and less declining in age with one gender
- Fairly large differences in bold leadership across gender and 17 organizational functions and by position and gender
- 8 "non-linear development" behaviors and actions that strengthen bold leadership

Jack Zenger and Joe Folkman presented this compelling new research in a **Bold Leadership webinar** last month. Jack and Joe also welcomed Kevin Wilde as a guest presenter for the webinar. Kevin is the VP of Organization Effectiveness & Chief Learning Officer at General Mills, an Award-Winning Development Leader, and Columnist for *Talent Management Magazine*.

You can download the eight companion competencies and developmental suggestions for Bold Leadership following the webinar.

Don't be timid. Watch the **Bold Leadership webinar** to build stronger leaders.

Balancing Life in the Fast Lane with Slow Country Backroads



Gandhi, the towering political and spiritual leader of India and the Indian independence movement, once observed *"There is more to life than increasing its speed."* But we live in an ever accelerating world. Zenger Folkman's research based on their "speed index" showed that extraordinary leaders are both quick and effective.

Ten years ago I bought a summer toy: a two-seat roadster convertible. At first, my wife, Heather, was just indulging me when she agreed to go along on a few rides. Fairly quickly, though, she got into the joy of cruising along tree-lined country roads in the open air as we chatted, basked in the sunshine, and sang along to our favorite music.

On warm weather "cruising days," when I am heading out on business, instead of blazing the fast lane of the expressway I have found a variety of quiet back-road alternatives. It does take extra time for these trips. When I do live life in the slow lane, I am struck by how often we choose the much faster superhighway, where the top is up, the wind doesn't ruffle our hair (or my expanding forehead), and our "scenery" is roaring trucks and tailgaters who are closer than they appear.

Too often we're so intent on getting to our next destination that we miss the joy of the trip. We're busy rushing toward our next goal. When we arrive, there's no time to savor it or look around before setting our sights on a new goal and off we rush again.

One of the great paradoxes of our time is balancing speed toward our destination with savoring all that the journey has to offer. Heather and I work hard and often pack a lot into our busy days. The busier we get the more important we find quiet country cruises become.

8 Ways to Build Leadership Development on the Job



Last year we started offering one-on-one phone coaching around *The Extraordinary Leader* 360 assessments and building strengths-based personal development plans. These typically involve 2, 3, and sometimes more sessions about a month or two apart. As leaders have reported back on their progress we've further developed and expanded their action plans.

Typically the first step in the leader's personal development plan is meeting with his or her manager. In one such meeting the senior executive and his manager realized their rankings of the most important skills for that leader's job were out of sync. Through discussion they realigned their views and agreed on the top skills needed for that position. This led to a more focused and relevant personal development plan that leveraged the executive's strengths, played to his passions, and addressed the most pressing organizational need for his role.

The leader also met with his direct reports and peers to review their feedback and get input to his personal development. Over the next few months of coaching sessions this executive's energy for growth and development intensified as he saw major improvements in his leadership effectiveness and results.

Leaders today are crazy-busy. They also know that their leadership development is vital. But work often trumps personal development. Everyone runs fast and hard and personal development is put off as executives look for a break in their schedules.

This is a false dichotomy. In his insightful keynote, ***8 Ways to Combine Development with Your Job***, presented at ZF's July Leadership Forum in Salt Lake City and also offered as a webinar last month, Jack Zenger showed why work and development shouldn't be seen as competing activities. Doing one can accomplish the other. Leaders can develop their leadership skills **and** get the job done.

Click here to access Jack's webinar and learn 8 ways you can bring personal development and your job closer together. Discover how you can transform your daily job activities into a practical leadership classroom and laboratory.

How Towering Strengths Overshadow Weaknesses



Last month Brad Smith and I attended Zenger Folkman's Extraordinary Leadership Summit and Coaching Symposium in Salt Lake City. A highlight of the three day event was Client presentations from, and panel discussions with, General Mills, General Motors, and McKesson Corporation (a *Fortune 500* healthcare services and IT company). With implementations ranging from two to 12 years we learned why these Clients were outstanding leaders in customizing ***The Extraordinary Leader*** and ***The Extraordinary Coach*** to their leadership and organization development needs.

One common theme was the high impact of strengths-based leadership development. This involved helping leaders understand the power of this counterintuitive approach, get strengths-based 360 feedback (unlike traditional 360s focused on weaknesses), and use research-based cross-training to leverage their strengths.

We heard about the challenges of shifting traditional thinking that improvement comes from fixing weaknesses or closing performance gaps. We also saw compelling data these companies have gathered on the impact of building leadership strengths. One of Joe Folkman's *Forbes* columns, "**Want to Become a Great Leader? Here's the Key**" provides an excellent example from another Client who tracked leaders that worked on fixing weaknesses versus those building strengths.

Improving weakness only moves you to average or a little above. Profound strengths overshadow weakness in extraordinary leaders, unless there is a "fatal flaw." In this video clip **How Towering Strengths Can Overshadow Weaknesses** I show some of the compelling data and demonstrate an exercise we use to illustrate why this works so effectively.

You can find lots more blogs, articles, research papers, and webinars on this ground breaking new approach at **Focusing on Strengths**.

Using 360 Assessments for Talent/Performance Management versus Personal Development



360 assessments are now being used by over 85% of larger and leading organizations. As I wrote in "**9 Problems with 360 Multi-Rater Assessments**" there's a growing backlash and resistance to their use because they often search for gaps and weaknesses.

Our work with Zenger Folkman has shown that 360 data on a leader's effectiveness can very accurately predict levels of employee engagement, turnover, customer satisfaction, discretionary effort, profitability, health and safety, and other key results. These correlations provide strong evidence that 360 assessment ratings can be powerful talent development tools in accurately predicting which leaders will be the most successful. One ZF study looked at correlations between "nine box" placement ratings, psychometric assessment data from a battery of popular tests, and our 360 ratings. Correlations between nine box placement data and 360 results were by far the strongest.

Many organizations use 360 assessments as a performance management tool where the leader's manager, HR/OD professionals, and perhaps a talent development management committee get a copy of the assessment report. In their *Talent Quarterly* article, **Can 360-Degree Feedback Predict Potential?**, Jack Zenger and Joe Folkman point out these pitfalls with that approach:

- **Assessment Manipulation** – this might include leaders not including any raters who might provide lower scores, influencing raters before they do the assessment, and peers or other raters who agree to give each other stronger ratings.
- **Culture/Situational Influences** – the organizational environment or team circumstances may be very positive or very negative. While leaders can build upon or buffer those factors, sometimes their ratings reflect happiness or dissatisfaction with broader issues.
- **Overweighed by Numbers** – some managers or development professionals put too much weight on the ratings and don't consider broader factors.

We are working with some organizations to combine "**Components of a Best-of-Class 360 Assessment**" with providing summary data or copies of the leader's assessment report to a manager, HR/OD professional, or talent development committee. This approach needs to be carefully managed to balance strengths-based personal development with some performance management and talent assessment.

New 'Greater Good in Action' Web Site is Very Useful



The Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley is part of the burgeoning research in the emerging field of **Positive Psychology**. Since 2001, the GGSC has been a leader in the "scientific movement to explore the roots of happy and compassionate individuals, strong social bonds, and altruistic behavior -- the science of a meaningful life." Based at the University of California, Berkeley, the GGSC's focus is to use science-based practices to help people and organizations build more meaningful personal and professional lives.

Their new **Greater Good in Action web site** is a synthesis of hundreds of scientific studies, and a very practical and succinct summary of the best research-based methods for a happier, more meaningful life. They've organized the site with a very easy to navigate layout. "Featured Practices" include Awe, Compassion, Connection, Empathy, Forgiveness, Gratitude, Happiness, Kindness, Mindfulness, Optimism, Resilience to Stress, and Self-Compassion.

Clicking on any of these topic areas leads to a variety of "casual, moderate, or intensive" applications to address that practice. Each practice provides this menu:

- Why you should do it
- How to do it
- Evidence that it works
- Why it works
- Sources
- Comments and Reviews

The site declares, "the practices in **Greater Good in Action** are for anyone who wants to improve his or her social and emotional well-being, or the well-being of others...these practices can create lasting improvements in individuals, families, and communities. Over time, they can evolve into habits, and from habits become a new way of experiencing the world."

I've started using some of the practices on the site and been reminded of others that I've let slide in my personal development. The combination of solid research providing compelling rationale and practical tips and tools is a powerful combination.

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.

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

Data from 20 countries with the most paid vacation days compared to the U.S. where vacations days are much lower.

"Are We More Productive When We Have More Time Off?" - Jack Zenger and Joseph Folkman
<https://hbr.org>

"We asked respondents to complete an assessment that measured their preference for working at a slow or fast pace... when we tested the differences between these groups for speed, quantity focus, and impatience we came upon some intriguing results..."

A look at the power of seeking to understand before giving our point of view.

"The Best Way To Deliver Tough Feedback: Stop Talking And Start Listening" - Joseph Folkman

www.forbes.com

"If you think that receiving corrective feedback is stressful and difficult for you, then you might be surprised to learn that your leader is experiencing many of the same feelings."

The recently updated *Extraordinary Coach* workshop & support materials are by far the best I've ever worked with.

"Zenger Folkman Coaching Video Wins Telly Award" - Business Wire

www.businesswire.com

"Zenger Folkman has been honored with a Bronze Telly Award for their new training video, 'A Coach Initiated Conversation.' A client of Zenger Folkman praised the new videos and stated: 'The videos are nothing short of stunning!'"

Leadership is an action, not a position. It's behavior and not the role that determines leadership.

"Taking Responsibility Is The Highest Mark Of Great Leaders" - Jack Zenger

www.forbes.com

"Much management literature surprisingly overlooks this characteristic, yet it explains many successes and failures, as well as a large portion of promotional decisions."

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 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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