



Issue 161 - August 2016

The Leader Letter

As I reflect on attending the Canadian Positive Psychology Association conference and Zenger Folkman's Leadership Summit over the past two months, Jonathon's Haidt's advice from *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom*, Jonathan Haidt rings true; "Work on your strengths, not your weaknesses... if it is a weakness you choose to work on, you probably won't enjoy the process... life offers so many chances to use one tool instead of another..."



Both conferences featured leading edge research showing the exponential power of building on strengths. A one-day CPPA workshop with Ryan Niemiec, Education Director & Psychologist, at the VIA Institute on Character, on "Mindfulness-Based Strengths Practice for Practitioners," added a new dimension to building our strengths. Ryan's found that most mindfulness approaches start with a focus on what's wrong. Starting with what's right and authentic (the real me) can help us to mindfully make better use of our strengths.

Hearing how international partners and Clients like AT &T and Yale University are using Zenger Folkman's strengths-based development reinforced the power of this approach. Going through ZF's new **Leadership Levers workshop** as a participant and then becoming certified to deliver it, demonstrated the exponential power of combining strengths with personal passions and the organization's needs to help a leader get the most out of both.

This issue features Harvard's new research on authentic leadership. Building and using strengths allows us to be truer to our real nature. What defines a strength? Who decides what a strength is? Strengths cover a broad range of resources, interests, talents, skills, and values. Self-definitions and strengths assessments are a good starting point. Getting feedback from those we're leading helps more clearly define leadership skills we can strengthen.

You can also learn how building herd immunity strengthens leadership development across the entire organization. Part of that strategy can include discovering and developing hidden reservoirs of talent. Leadership skills are best leveraged through developing key strengths that matter most to the leader and his or her organization.

Strength building is a vital element in the happiness equation emerging from research in positive psychology. Martin Seligman, the founder of this movement concludes, "Authentic happiness comes from identifying and cultivating your most fundamental strengths and using them every day in work, love, play, and parenting."

Steps to Strengthening Authentic Leadership

In their book, *Learning to Lead*, Warren Bennis and Joan Goldsmith write, "To be authentic is literally to be your own author (the words derive from the same Greek root), to discover your native energies and desires, and then find your own way of acting on them. When you have done that, you are not existing simply to live up to an image posed by the culture or by family tradition or some other authority. When you write your own life, you have played the game that was natural for you to play. You have kept covenant with your own promise."



Genuine leadership comes from within. It's built on a foundation of honesty and integrity. It goes beyond reputation and personality; it is a function of character. Ringing true to me. It calls for ever-deepening honesty and integrity in my self-awareness and reflections. It also means obtaining continual feedback from others to see how they see me. This is essential if, as a leader, I am attempting to influence or change others.

In the research for his book, *Discover Your True North*, Harvard Business School professor, Bill George and his team interviewed 172 authentic leaders. From this work he recommends these steps to strengthening authentic leadership:

- Explore their life stories and their crucibles
- Engage in reflection and introspective practices
- Seeking honest feedback
- Understand their leadership purpose
- Become skilled at tailoring their style

As I wrote in "**Authentic Leadership Comes from Building Our Strengths**", most leadership development approaches and competency models focus on improving weaker areas. Needs assessments and performance evaluations look for gaps and design training or build improvement plans to fix weaknesses. A key reason for the high failure rate of this typical approach stems from attempts to change a leader's stripes. Much deeper authenticity -- and much higher success -- comes from building a leader's natural strengths.

Discovering and Developing Hidden Reservoirs of Talent

How important are these six skills to leadership effectiveness? Which ones are most effective and should be developed?

Innovation: encouraging new ideas and solutions through creative approaches

Relationships: developing strong relationships built on trust, respect, and consideration

Acumen: acquiring knowledge and skills to be at the cutting edge of business practices

Inspiration: motivating others to perform at their highest potential

Strategic Vision: communicating a clear vision to accomplish key objectives

Execution: consistently delivering extraordinary results



Are you tempted to fly off in all directions at once and try to develop all of them?

Zenger Folkman studied their database of over one million leadership assessments to identify the leadership skills providing the highest leverage. These six emerged with the highest impact.

The research also showed that raising just one of these skills from good to great moves the leader's effectiveness from the 39th to the 72nd percentile. Increasing three of these leadership levers catapults a leader to the top 10 percent of all leaders.



Which skill should a leader develop? What leadership development should organizations provide?

In their new white paper, **Discovering and Developing Hidden Reservoirs of Talent**, ZF executives show that leadership leverage comes from helping leaders find their "sweet spot" at the intersection of their strengths, passion, and organizational need for their role. They have strong evidence that this taps into hidden reservoirs of talent often underdeveloped.

Click on **Discovering and Developing Hidden Reservoirs of Talent** for a complimentary download of our latest white paper.

Who Decides What's a Strength?

As we heard at the recent Canadian Positive Psychology Association conference, strengths-based approaches are rapidly spreading across fields of personal growth/development, education, leadership, organization effectiveness, community building, coaching, counselling, and others.

In our field of leadership/organization development we're hearing more talk about strengths-based tools and techniques. But we're often not talking about the same thing when discussing strengths. Like the different forms of beauty,



quality, or intelligence, strengths are in the eye of the beholder. It boils down to definition, perception, and perspective.

Psychologist, Ryan Niemiec, is Education Director at the VIA Institute on Character. VIA's Character Strengths framework forms the backbone of Positive Psychology. I attended a few of Ryan's workshops at the CPPA conference and found them highly useful. I've started reading his well-researched and written book, *Mindfulness & Character Strengths: A Practical Guide to Flourishing*.

Ryan provides a very useful distinction on the types of strengths:

- **Talents** – innate abilities like IQ, musical, or athletic giftedness
- **Skills** – proficiencies developed through training and development
- **Interests** – personal passions like sports, arts, or hobbies
- **Values** – personal beliefs, principles, or ideals
- **Resources** – external supports such as social, community, or spiritual connections

These distinctions deepened my understanding of building strengths. Our strengths-based leadership development work with *The Extraordinary Leader* is clearly skill building. Getting skills feedback through a 360 assessment becomes a critical part of understanding how a leader is perceived by others and the people he or she is influencing or leading.

Skills or competencies often align with our talents, interests, or values. Self-assessment tools like StrengthsFinder or the VIA survey can provide insights to a leader's personal preferences or what he or she considers to be his or her internal strengths.

However, self-assessments are often less helpful with strengthening leadership skills. As outlined in "**Beware the Self-Assessment Trap**", self-assessment is only half as accurate as feedback from others.

An old Groucho Marx line is "who are you going to believe, me or your own eyes?" Different types of strengths depend on who's perceiving them and whether they're viewed from an internal or external perspective.

Webinar: Herd Immunity and Leadership Development

How many of these common problems with leadership development apply to your organization:

- Not tied to organizational strategies
- Separating reflection and insight from real work
- Development requires behavior change but uses unproven methods
- Lack of managerial involvement
- Lack of measurement
- Lack of follow-up and sustainment
- Focused on the individual, not on leadership team and changing the culture



Last month I attended Zenger Folkman's Leadership Summit in Salt Lake City. This was my fifth year attending this international conference. It's a great time to reconnect and recharge, hear Client experiences, work with international ZF partners, and learn about new research and leadership development programs.

Jack Zenger presented his latest thinking and research on **Herd Immunity and Leadership Development**. I first started working with Jack in 1981 when he co-owned and led Zenger Miller and I co-owned and led The Achieve Group. Our companies were partners until the early 1990s and I attended many ZM conferences during that

decade. In 2012 Jack and I formed a renewed partnership with our current companies, Zenger Folkman and The CLEMMER Group.

Jack continues to provide insights and research on the fast-evolving field of leadership development. This presentation is based on substantial agreement that the objectives for ideal leadership development include acquiring new skills and self-awareness, immediate implementation of these skills, and long-term sustainment of that behavior change.

During this Summit keynote address Jack discussed:

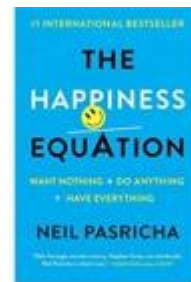
- The several actions that some organizations undertake and how these combine to create long-lasting change.
- Evidence of how many companies fail to practice the basic principle of herd immunity by involving only a handful of a large population, and the consequences that follow as a result.
- Examples of new sustainment tools that have been developed and how they can be used to better fulfill the objectives of leadership development.

[Click here](#) to watch Jack's presentation -- and build your herd immunity!

Review of *The Happiness Equation* by Neil Pasricha

With the rapid growth of Positive Psychology there's been an explosion in books on happiness. Amazon lists 100,000 books on the topic!

I lean heavily toward personal, leadership, or organization development books that are evidence-based. Neil does cite some research and many of his approaches align well with the emerging science of well-being. What sets this book apart is simplicity, practicality, and readability. Neil uses a breezy, conversational style, liberally illustrated with his "scribbles" or hand drawn diagrams. The very short chapters -- some only one page -- makes the book easy and fun to browse.



Here are a few points that stood out most for me:

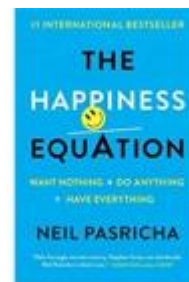
- The traditional equation of Great work -> Big Success -> Be Happy needs to Change to Be Happy -> Great Work -> Big Success. Be happy needs to come first.
- Do it for you. Don't do it to please others.
- Lack of self-confidence is the root of why we pay too much attention to critics and compare ourselves to others to gauge our success. High opinion of both ourselves and others is what brings confidence.
- We're programmed to scan for problems to fix and dangers to watch out for. We have much to be grateful for and need to focus on our strengths and positives.
- Retirement is a new concept, a Western concept, and a broken concept based on the assumptions that we enjoy doing nothing instead of being productive. Work gives us socializing, structure, stimulation, and story (purpose).
- How much are you truly earning when you break it down hourly? Overvalue you and your own time.
- Reduce your choices and decisions.
- Multi-tasking is a myth -- we can only do one thing at a time.
- Create space for yourself.
- It's easier to act yourself into a new way of thinking than to think yourself into a new way of acting.
- Be you -- be authentic. Your relationship with yourself is the most important relationship in your life.
- Your spouse/life partner has a huge impact on your happiness.

- You can take advice, but you need to listen to your inner voice and decide for yourself.

Neil calls many of his chapters and sections "secrets." But they're becoming pretty well-known now. If you're looking for an inspiring and uplifting summary or reminder of what leads to higher happiness and well-being, *The Happiness Equation* adds up to time well invested.

Thoughts That Make You Go Hmmm from.... *The Happiness Equation* by Neil Pasricha

This instinctive need for what we don't yet have creates in us a persistent state of dissatisfaction. Without it, our ancestors would always be only one failed hunting session away from starvation.unhappiness is nature's way of keeping people on their toes. It's a crude system, but it has worked for thousands of years.



Studies show that when we begin to value the rewards we get for doing a task, we lose our inherent interest in doing the task.

Self-success is in your head. It's invisible! Only you know if you have it. Self-success means you achieved what you wanted to achieve. For yourself. You're genuinely proud of your accomplishment, you're happy with your work, and, most important, you're satisfied. You want nothing. You feel contentment.

Morihei Ueshiba, founder of the Japanese martial art aikido, said, "As soon as you concern yourself with the 'good' and 'bad' of your fellows, you create an opening in your heart for maliciousness to enter. Testing, competing with, and criticizing others weaken and defeat you."

No matter what happens right now, Triumph or Disaster, it's an impostor. You should treat them the same. Winning or losing is the same. Place the game in the context of your entire life. The world will go on.

When you're through changing, learning, working to stay involved -- only then are you through.

Be you. Be you and be cool with it. Love your ticks and nicks and loves and scratches and fears and passions. Knowing them leads to living them, and living them leads to loving them.

Bronnie Ware is an Australian palliative nurse who spent years taking care of the dying in the last three months of their lives. "When questioned about any regrets they had or anything they would do differently," she says, "common themes surfaced again and again:"

- I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me
- I wish I hadn't worked so hard
- I wish I had the courage to express my feelings
- I wish I had stayed in touch with my friends
- I wish that I had let myself be happier

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:

Making leadership development stick and shifting "herd" behavior calls for an integrated and cascading approach.

"The Organizational Epidemic: Is Your Herd Immune?" -- Jack Zenger

www.forbes.com

"Changing the behavior of a few at the top of the organizational chart will do little to protect the rest of the herd. Every manager at every level can make a big difference in the inoculation and the protection of the herds they will lead."

How do you think you're doing on the seven characteristics of good coaches? How do you know?

"People Who Think They're Great Coaches Often Aren't" -- Jack Zenger and Joe Folkman, *Harvard Business Review*

<https://hbr.org>

"The most critical test for measuring your effectiveness as a coach lies not in your belief about your own skills but rather on how the recipients of your coaching rate your skills (and on how their own competencies increase afterward)."

Based on correlation studies of top relationship builders, nine companion behaviors clustered into three critical themes:

"The 3 Keys To Relationship Building That Separate Mediocre Leaders From The Brightest And Best" -- Jack Zenger

www.forbes.com

"Learning to improve relationships will not only increase the engagement and commitment of those you work with, it will also improve your quality of life."

Four main findings providing good how-to points along with identifying which of six listening levels we might aim for.

"What Great Listeners Actually Do" -- Jack Zenger and Joe Folkman, *Harvard Business Review* blog

<https://hbr.org>

"We identified those who were perceived as being the most effective listeners (the top 5%). We then compared the best listeners to the average of all other people in the data set and identified the 20 items showing the largest significant difference."

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!



Jim Clemmer
President

Phone: (519) 748-5968

Email: jim.clemmer@clemmergroup.com

Website: www.clemmergroup.com



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The CLEMMER Group

10 Pioneer Drive, Suite 105, Kitchener ON N2P 2A4

Phone: (519) 748-1044 ~ Fax: (519) 748-5813

service@clemmer.net

www.clemmergroup.com

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