

THE LEADER LETTER

Leading with *STRENGTH*

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The lead article in this issue is "Thoughts That Make You Go Hmmm on ... Reading and Leading."

As much as the evidence shows that extraordinary leaders are often avid readers, today's hectic pace makes it especially challenging for many leaders to do as much reading as they'd like. In over ten years of publishing *The Leader Letter* I've worked hard to provide subscribers with much more value than they are paying for.



Of course, there's never been a charge for my [blog](#) or newsletter subscription. But a major investment for you, dear reader, is your very scarce time. Since less is more I've just put my blog and newsletter on a slim fast diet.

I am aiming for a few paragraphs, summaries, or bullet points you can read in a couple of minutes. I'll load my posts with hyperlinks and "further reading" sections that allow you to drill deeper into the topic if you feel it's worth investing more of your time.

Dr. Seuss once wrote, "so the writer who breeds more words than he needs, is making a chore for the reader who reads." I am working to not breed more words and reduce your reading chore!

I welcome your feedback at Jim.Clemmer@Clemmer.net on this new approach, as well as questions and topics you'd like to see me address.

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"Reprinted with permission from *The Leader Letter*, Jim Clemmer's free e-newsletter. For almost thirty years, Jim's 2,000 + practical leadership presentations and workshops/retreats, seven bestselling books, columns, and newsletters have been helping hundreds of thousands of people worldwide. His web site is www.clemmergroup.com."



THOUGHTS THAT MAKE YOU GO HMMM ON ... READING AND LEADING

"Books are the bees which carry the quickening pollen from one to another mind."

- James Russell Lowell, 19th century American Romantic poet, critic, editor, and diplomat



"All leaders, whether contrarian or otherwise, are heavily influenced by what they read. Indeed, in many cases leaders are directed and inspired as much by their readings as they are by their closest advisors. Thus the choices a leader makes as to what to read can be crucial in the long run."

- Steven B. Sample, leadership author and past president of the University of Southern California (USC)

"Neglecting development and refinement of the mind, and not acquiring the habit of reading and study."

- One of *The Six Mistakes of Man* listed by Cicero the ancient Roman philosopher, orator, and politician

"Learning is experienced as a personal transformation. A person does not gather learnings as possessions but rather becomes a new person ... To learn is not to have, it is to be."

- Gib Akin, University of Virginia professor after interviewing 60 managers and finding their learning experiences "surprisingly congruous"

"He that loves reading, has everything within his reach. He has but to desire, and he may possess himself of every species of wisdom to judge and power to perform."

- William Godwin, English journalist, political philosopher, and novelist

"I'm a voracious reader. Twenty percent of what I read are business books. I read all the journals. I read biographies, novels ... leadership is an intensive journey into yourself."

- Jeffery Immelt, chairman and CEO, General Electric

"Reading all the good books is like a conversation with the finest men of past centuries."

- René Descartes, French philosopher, mathematician, and writer

"There are three kinds of people: The ones that learn by reading, the few who learn by observation, the rest who have to pee on the electric fence."

- Will Rogers, American cowboy, humorist, actor, and social commentator

HOW TO RAISE HONESTY AND INTEGRITY FROM GOOD TO GREAT

Tom is a strong manager with a solid track record of energizing and pulling teams together to deliver results in difficult circumstances. He's been rising steadily in his organization. Tom thrives on ever more challenging assignments and driving hard to continue growing his leadership effectiveness and career opportunities.



A recent 360 assessment from Tom's direct reports, peers, manager, and others he works with showed that one of his strengths is honesty and integrity. Tom was both gratified and puzzled by this feedback. It was gratifying to learn that he was seen as trustworthy, dependable, and well respected. This aligned with one of his organization's core values of Trust and Respect. And it resonated with Tom's pride in being an authentic leader following his moral compass. He'd always tried to speak his truth, keep his word, and deliver on commitments.

But Tom was puzzled by how to move this central leadership strength from good to great. How could he raise perceptions of his honesty and integrity from somewhat above average to outstanding? Should he concentrate on being really, really -- perhaps even brutally -- honest? Could he try to be honest 'harder?'

"Maybe I should be a totally open book and tweet everything I am doing and thinking with everyone" he mused. If Tom asked you for advice what would you suggest?

Joe Folkman provided insightful answers to Tom's conundrum in his webinar [How to Make Honest People MORE Honest](#). In this webinar Joe discussed Zenger Folkman's research uncovering eight companion behaviors to honesty and integrity. When developed, or performed well, these act as levers to increase honesty and overall leadership success. Joe's recent Forbes column [How to Make Your Organization More Honest](#) also provides further background, examples, and insights.

[Click here](#) to view the archived webinar. Watch Joe's presentation to discover all eight of these behaviors and how you can put them to work as you build your own leadership development -- and discover what advice you could give to Tom!

BRINGING SCIENCE TO THE ART OF COACHING

Recently I went to Amazon and searched for coaching books. I was presented with 29,935 books to peruse. I typed "coaching programs" into Google and got 687,000 hits.



Coaching is so popular because -- done effectively -- it can turbocharge personal, team, and organization performance. But there's a mind-numbing array of frameworks, processes, experts, methods, steps, techniques, and evangelism on coaching. What really works? Which approaches provide the biggest return on investment?

The second half of my 60 minute [11 Keys to Building Extraordinary Leaders and Coaches](#) webinar gives a 20 minute summary of research on building a coaching culture. Some of that research is found in Zenger Folkman's white paper [Bringing Science to the Art of Coaching](#). This succinct paper is built around these key questions:

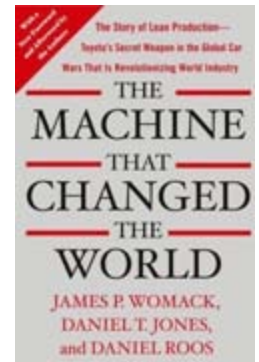
- To what degree does coaching really pay off? Or, is this just one more in a long line of management fads?
- How can we increase the effectiveness of each coaching session?
- How can the process of coaching be made more consistent?
- What is the appropriate goal for coaching, and how much change can we expect?
- What is it about the coaches' personality or behavior that makes the most positive impact?

Click on [Bringing Science to the Art of Coaching](#) for a free copy and get answers to these questions. You don't have to read a mountain of books to improve coaching skills. Cut through the coaching clatter and learn what builds truly extraordinary coaching skills.

There are still a few seats left in my [Extraordinary Leader and Extraordinary Coach public workshops](#) on December 5 and 6 just 10 minutes from Toronto's international airport.

LEADERSHIP AND CULTURE DEVELOPMENT IS CRITICAL TO LEAN/SIX SIGMA SUCCESS

Lean/Six Sigma was brought into more popular use with the Total Quality Management/Continuous Quality Improvement movements over two decades ago (you can read some of the roots of approach in this online [Introduction to Firing on all Cylinders: The Service/Quality System for High-Powered Corporate Performance](#)). In 1990 MIT researcher James P. Womack published *The Machine That Changed the World* which brought the term "lean production" to the world. He's since written many books expanding on the topic and founded the Lean Enterprise Institute.



In speaking to the Association for Manufacturing Excellence (AME) in Toronto this fall Womack outlined these four common misconceptions of Lean:

- Cost Cutting Exercise – Lean is really about increasing output with less waste.
- Focused on Factory Production – listening to customers and running the entire enterprise on Lean principles is critical to long-term success.
- Inside Your Own Walls – effective implementation encompasses the entire supply-chain in linking internal and external partners to increase service/quality.
- Management Can Delegate Lean – two-way communication and continual cooperation is needed across all levels across the organization.

Womack based much of his research on the success of the Toyota Production System. Jeff Liker, Professor of Industrial and Operations Engineering at the University of Michigan, has extensively studied Toyota. His many books on their breakthrough approaches include *The Toyota Way: 14 Management Principles from the World's Greatest Manufacturer*. Jeff's "four key failure factors" of Lean/Six Sigma align well with Womack's work. In a previous blog, "[Lasting Organizational Change Balances Doing and Being](#)", he identifies the failure factors as:

- *Leadership lacking deep understanding and commitment*
- *Focus on tools and techniques without understanding the underlying cultural transformation required*
- *Superficial program instead of deep development of processes that surface problems solved by thinking people*
- *Isolated process improvements instead of creating integrated systems for exceptional customer value*

As with many organization transformation efforts the return on investment of Lean/Six Sigma has ranged from some dramatic

successes, lots of mediocre results, and dismal failures. Many service and healthcare organizations are now reaching for these powerful tools in an attempt to improve quality, streamline operations, and improve customer service. If they're going to succeed leaders need to practice [Lean Leadership](#) and [focus on culture and leadership development](#) as much as Lean tools and techniques.

LETTING GO OF OUR WEAKNESSES IS REALLY HARD

Two readers recently posted comments voicing the common struggles many people have in letting go of weaknesses when developing leadership effectiveness.



One reader responded to Zenger Folkman's *Harvard Business Review* blog [Three Myths About Your Strengths](#) by naming a fourth myth as focusing on your strengths means you can ignore your weaknesses. He went on to declare a widely shared belief: *"You also need to acknowledge your weaknesses and take the steps to improve them. Although focusing on your strengths can position you as a high achiever in certain areas, ignoring your weaknesses can be damaging to your reputation in other areas."*

Our research clearly shows that focusing on strengths rather than weaknesses leads to leaders being rated 2 - 3 times higher in their effectiveness 18 - 24 months later in follow up 360 assessments. This reader's comment is right on when it comes to focusing on a "fatal flaw" -- a glaring weakness that shines so negatively people can't see past it to our strengths.

Fatal flaws clearly need to be addressed. Deciding whether a weakness is a fatal flaw or just a weaker area is tricky. It starts with getting data from direct reports, peers, our manager, and others (a 360 assessment) on skills or competencies that actually matter to our role. For example, communicating and influencing may not be a fatal flaw to a highly creative person in a key technical role.

Another reader wrote; *"the often overdone need to 'focus on the positive' energy can remove the ability to move ahead. We need to be real and whole in creative thinking."*

We do need to focus on weaknesses -- when they block our strengths and are fatal to us moving ahead. As counter-intuitive and uncommon as it feels, strengths-based leadership and positive psychology research provides clear and compelling evidence that we need to let go of unrealistic beliefs that exceptional leaders or flourishing people are good at everything. 500,000 assessments of 50,000 leaders have

shown that 3 - 5 towering strengths so strongly overshadow weaker areas those extraordinary leaders are in the very top 10 percent. Building a strength from good to great is much easier, more fun -- and 2 to 3 times more effective than -- trying to improve a weakness.

Despite the fast growing and overwhelming research to the contrary, equating improvement with fixing weaknesses is deeply ingrained in organizational cultures and our psyches. As I wrote a few months ago in "[Don't be Seduced by the Dark Side](#)", it's really tough to accept our humanness -- our weaknesses -- and focus on building strengths.

Work with me and our powerful research-based approach to develop your strengths at my December 5 and 6 [Extraordinary Leader and Extraordinary Coach public workshops](#) just 15 minutes from the Toronto airport.

STRENGTHS-BASED DEVELOPMENT FOR PARENTING AND EDUCATION

An [11 Keys to Building Extraordinary Leaders and Coaches](#) webinar participant e-mailed me with this observation and question:

"It's amazing that for so long our organization has been concentrating on improving employee weaknesses and seemed to forget about helping them achieve greatness by focusing on what they are good at. I assume I can use this concept on my son as well, correct? How do you think we (as parents) can employ this with our children? I seem to focus on his weaknesses and forget about his strengths – can I assume I can see the same results as you have seen in the corporate world with my son?"



This participant's organization isn't at all unique. "Performance improvement" in the vast majority of organizations is focused on weaknesses. That's one of the big reasons we have employee engagement issues and very poor rates of change from our leadership development programs.

She's on the right track about working with her son. The Positive Psychology movement has focused quite a bit on using strengths-based teaching and parenting to bring out the best in kids.

An academic researcher in the education field sent this e-mail:

"We are planning to conduct a study on building extraordinary coaching skills in schools across our country as learning organizations. We're planning to root our study in the appreciative inquiry method embedded in a qualitative research paradigm. Please suggest some reading to support this."

Building coaching skills in schools clearly has a strong impact on student learning and motivation. I recommended Zenger Folkman's book [*The Extraordinary Coach: How the Best Leaders Help Others Grow*](#). Since the researcher is interested in strengths-based and appreciative inquiry approaches I also recommend the rapidly growing body of research on Positive Psychology pioneered by Martin Seligman. His most recent book, [*Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well Being*](#) features a chapter on "Positive Education: Teaching Well-Being to Young People," that outlines the global work he and his colleagues are doing in the educational field.

If the burgeoning and ground breaking field of strengths-based leadership development interests you, please join us in [Zenger Folkman's LinkedIn discussion group](#). If you're not connected to me already, please go to my profile at <http://ca.linkedin.com/in/jimclemmer/> and send me an invitation to connect.

LEADERSHIP EXCELLENCE ESSENTIALS A RICH COLLECTION OF EXPERT ADVICE

Are you looking for quick, easy -- and high quality -- online material from top experts in leadership development, personal growth, or sales and service excellence without searching all over the Internet? Would you like a "one stop site" to access surveys and benchmark data, learning modules, and custom content for your organization?



I've enjoyed working with both Ken Shelton at *Executive Excellence* and the good people at HR.com for many years. Both have published many of my blogs and articles and have been a pleasure to work with. This summer Ken's publications were acquired by HR.com and he's now part of a much bigger community who can benefit from his high quality work. Go to [The Essentials Interactive Collection](#) for an overview of what's available now and what's coming soon.

Starting with the inaugural August 2013 issue, [Leadership Excellence Essentials](#), is a monthly online publication that's been upgraded by embedding multi-media in many of the articles. And it's all free when you sign up at HR.com's site. The first three archived issues include articles by Gary Hamel, Patrick Lencioni, Marshall Goldsmith, Jack Zenger, Joe Folkman, James O'Toole, Chip Bell, and many other experts. Topics include accountability, disruptive heroes, talent myths, leadership competence, preparing leaders, leader likability, ego vs. EQ, employee engagement, how leaders are made, positive deviants, strengths and fatal flaws, culture, and lots more.

Read, lead, and succeed with this powerful new publishing partnership. May they thrive in bringing us ever higher quality content and interactivity!

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:

Jack raises key points and stirs up a rousing debate on the vital issue of employee engagement.

["Why Gallup's 70% Disengagement Data Is Wrong"](#) --
Jack Zenger
www.forbes.com

"... will create unintended and negative prejudices in the way managers perceive and then behave toward their subordinates. This, in turn, will become a destructive self-fulfilling prophecy."

Practical how-to steps for those difficult and sometimes courageous conversations so critical to developing others.

["Feedback Without The Fireworks: How Not To Be A Negative Creep"](#) -- Geoffrey Tumin
www.fastcompany.com

Negative feedback is an important reality of the workplace. But it can often backfire. Here's how to do it the right way.

The journaling habit aligns with positive psychology and strengths-based leadership research and practices.

["The One Thing Successful People Do Every Day"](#) --
William Arruda
www.forbes.com

"Although you may feel like you don't have time for one more activity in your day, this one action will have a huge impact on your success. Make time for it, make it a habit, and watch your career take off."

Joe's latest research featured in last week's webinar now archived for viewing at <http://zengerfolkman.com/featured-webinar>.

"[How To Make Your Organization More Honest](#)" -- Joe Folkman
www.forbes.com

"Most people consider themselves to be honest, but what could help a leader make the transition from good to unmistakably great? How does an honest leader become extremely honest?"

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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The CLEMMER Group
10 Pioneer Drive, Suite 105, Kitchener ON N2P 2A4
Phone: (519) 748-1044 ~ Fax: (519) 748-5813
E-mail: service@clemmer.net
<http://www.clemmergroup.com>