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The December 1 issue of *Fortune* magazine has an in-depth profile of Satya Nadella, the new CEO of Microsoft, entitled "The Man Who is Transforming Microsoft." Writer, Andrew Nusca, was "on the road with Satya Nadella's traveling rival show" during a recent whirlwind tour of Europe. During those busy few days Andrew gained insights into why Satya's showing very strong early success at Microsoft and the philosophies anchoring his leadership.



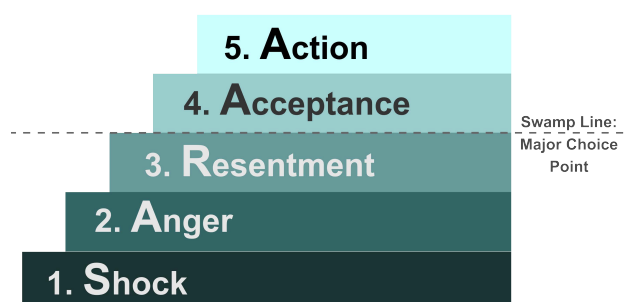
As we work with leaders dealing with disruptive change and relentless pressures to do more with less, we see huge differences in their **critical choices of whether to lead, follow, or wallow**. So this passage from Andrew's article leaped out at me:

"...In his chosen leaders Nadella prizes the abilities to bring clarity, create energy, and suppress the urge to whine. 'I say, Hey, look, you're in a field of shit, and your job is to be able to find the rose petals,' as opposed to saying, 'Oh, I'm in a field of shit,' he says. 'C'mon! You're a leader. That's what it is. You can't complain about constraints. We live in a constrained world.'"

We often crash into constraints during life's most turbulent times or traumatic losses. These are major choice points. Do we ultimately become better or bitter? Do we climb the leadership stairs to a higher state of awareness and appreciation or do we slide down into the quagmire of hopelessness and despair?

For decades I've been using the SARAA formula below to outline our choices in responding to being tossed into the swamp. Often we find ourselves up to our eyeballs when we least expect it. When that happens, we often experience one, two, or all three of the first steps of the SARAA formula below. Whether we successfully get to step five depends upon whether we choose to wallow, follow, or lead.

S.A.R.A.A.



The first three steps can get us bogged down in the wallowing swamp. This can be part of the grieving process that we might need to go through to let go of what was, face what is (step four), and move ourselves onward and upward with our lives (step five). If we eventually manage to climb the leadership stairway after the major setback or loss, we'll often reflect back on the experience. "It was the best thing that ever happened to me." "It made me stronger." "I appreciate life more now." "It reset my priorities to what's really important." "I don't sweat the small stuff anymore." "It forced us to make the changes we really needed to make." "It shocked us out of our complacency."

Steps one through three can be a time of emotional readjustment or healthy venting. But to get bogged down in any one of these stages is to stew in the swamp and begin breathing in the toxic vapors. We may find ourselves on an occasional detour through the emotional quagmire of why-me and this-isn't-fair, but to languish there is deadly to our health, happiness, and success.

The first article in this issue looks at the vital topic of hardiness and resilience so vital to dealing with life's many setbacks and problems. You'll also look further at the emerging research and approaches to building strengths. This is a key element in building our resilience and effectiveness.

Whatever hits the fan is often not evenly or fairly distributed. Our choice is whether to wallow in it or not.

Keys to Strengthening Hardiness and Resilience

In Japan the Daruma Doll is a good luck charm with a rounded bottom. When knocked down, it bounces back upright. This ability to bounce back is a symbol of perseverance and good luck. The doll is modelled after Bodhidharma, a Buddhist monk who founded Zen about 15 centuries ago. Legend has it he meditated for nine years without moving until his legs and arms atrophied and fell off. Many Buddhist temples sell dolls without eyes for goal setting. The purchaser paints one eye in when he or she has set a goal. Once the goal is attained the other eye is painted in.



Last month I delivered the opening keynote at a conference in Edmonton on building resilient families and communities. Resilience and bouncing back is vital right now in a very tough Alberta economy knocked down by low oil prices and battered by the horrific fire last spring in Fort McMurray that destroyed over 2,400 buildings and 600 work camp units.

This keynote was a customized version of *Leading @ the Speed of Change* built around our **Lead, Follow, or Wallow** framework with a focus on building hardiness and resilience in ourselves and others. While strengthening resilience or bounce-back has been a key theme in much of my work, preparation for this keynote sent me back into my research files.

How we use the F-Word is key to resilience. Is failure:

- Temporary or permanent?
- An experience or who we are?
- Something to be learned from or crushed by?

- Traumatizing or growth inducing?

The International Committee for the Study of Victimization looked at the hardiness of large groups of people who had all suffered serious adversity like cancer patients, prisoners of war, accident victims, etc. They found the survivors fell into three groups. Those who:

1. Used the experience as a defining event that made them stronger.
2. Got their life back to "normal".
3. Were permanently dispirited by the event.

In her *Harvard Business Review* article, "How Resilience Works," Diane Coutu writes, "We all know people who, under duress, throw up their hands and cry, 'How can this be happening to me?' Such people see themselves as victims, and living through hardship carries no lessons for them. But resilient people devise constructs about their suffering to create some sort of meaning for themselves and others... an increasing body of empirical evidence shows that resilience – whether in children, survivors of concentration camps, or businesses back from the brink – can be learned."

A Japanese Proverb teaches, "Fall seven times, stand up eight." As part of his highly inspiring leadership legacy Nelson Mandela said, "Do not judge me by my successes, judge me by how many times I fell and got back up."

Archived Webinar Now Available: *Ground Breaking New Approaches to Leadership and Coaching Development*

Would you like to:

- Increase employee engagement by up to 8 times?
- Double/triple leader's motivation to implement a personal development plan?
- Build coaching and leadership skills around natural strengths?
- Make performance appraisals an inspiring event people look forward to?
- Double rates of improvement from 360 feedback?



Sounds farfetched, I know. It might even sound like I am about to send out e-mails declaring the death of a rich uncle with unclaimed millions just waiting for you!

But these claims are supported by rigorous research. In yesterday's webinar on *Ground Breaking New Approaches to Leadership and Coaching Development* I backed up these statements with evidence. Click on the link if you'd like to watch the webinar.

Here's what I covered in 60 minutes of "skipping across the ice bergs" of deeper new research and applications:

1. Same Old Approaches = Same Old Results
2. Keys to Building Coaching and Leadership Strengths
3. Critical Differences Between Traditional 360s and a Strengths-Based 360

4. Cross Training: A Revolutionary New Approach to Building Strengths
5. Six Steps to Extraordinary Coaching
6. Possible Next Steps
7. Q & A

Momentum is shifting toward building strengths instead of fixing weaknesses (which most performance management and development plans focus on). More and more organizations are using this approach to build highly effective leaders. Just this month, Amazon.com announced they're scrapping their traditional performance appraisal system and moving to a strengths focus, joining the ranks of General Mills, Wells Fargo, Queens University, and many others.

Zenger Folkman's pre/post studies show that when a leader finds his or her leadership and coaching "sweet spot" he or she doubles the payoff of their development efforts. I never tire of watching workshop participants build excitement and energy for acting on their 360 feedback when they find their key leverage point.

I am again looking forward to facilitating our rare public (most sessions are in-house) workshops of *The Extraordinary Leader* and *The Extraordinary Coach* in Toronto on Jan 17 and 18. These sessions (you can attend either or both) provide a personalized map – tailored to the specific strengths that will make the greatest impact on team and organizational results. Participants create a personal development plan to leverage his or her skills and elevate their leadership effectiveness. You can find [full details here](#).

In his book *Strength-Based Leadership Coaching in Organizations: An Evidence-Based Guide to Positive Leadership Development*, executive coach Doug McKie reports:

"Strength-based approaches have the capacity to enhance the working lives and effectiveness of all employees by helping them raise awareness of their strengths, align them with the needs of the organization and build mastery in leadership capability. Used skillfully and wisely, strength-based approaches have the capacity to transform leadership capability within organizations."

Good Questions: Following Up our Essential Elements Webinar

Last month I delivered a 45 minute webinar on **Essential Elements of Leadership, Coaching, and Culture Development** (click the link to review the archived session). This was followed by 15 minutes of audience Q & A. Here a few more good questions I wasn't able to get to in our brief time together:

Q: Is it possible to focus on fixing the fatal flaw and also focusing on strengths?



The good news is that poor leaders can change their spots. One **research study showed that 75% of leaders showed significant improvement** after fixing a major weakness that was fatal to his or her effectiveness. In our *Extraordinary Leader* workshops and **one-on-one coaching sessions** we find that a successful and motivating approach for leaders is to use 360 assessment feedback on their key strengths to leverage those into addressing their fatal flaws. **Steve Jobs was a great example of how towering strengths can overshadow weaknesses.**

Q: What is the biggest challenge with working on organizational culture?

Getting senior executives to understand that changing "them" starts with changing "me/us." The culture of any organization ripples out from the top team leading it. When our kids were growing up I'd sometimes see them doing something that was inappropriate or inconsistent with what we'd been teaching them. If I was really honest and looked deep into the parenting mirror I could recognize where that behavior was coming from. It clearly came from – their mother! Well, maybe I played a part too... It's tough to see our own values and priorities being reflected back to us in the behaviors of those we lead. We've yet to see a successful culture change effort that didn't start at the top with a major focus on **executive team building and culture development**.

Q: When you are using the strengths-based approach, do you ever discuss weaknesses during a performance review and how that person can improve upon those? What kind of approach can you use to discuss weaknesses but still using the strengths-based approach?

It's vital to distinguish weakness from fatal flaws. If something is causing a big problem for the person who's performance you're reviewing than you need to focus on that. The best way to do that is through leveraging his or her strengths. This builds confidence and motivation along with a higher likelihood he or she can and will change. **"Why Personal Development Plans Fail – and How to Fix It"** shows the exponential power of finding the intersection of strengths, passion, and organization need. **Feedforward is an emerging new approach** to performance management that's proving to be much more effective.

You can learn more about the latest research on new methods for coaching and leadership development in my most recent webinar on **Groundbreaking New Approaches to Leadership and Coaching Development**.

Review of *Strengths-Based Coaching in Organizations* by Doug MacKie

Positive Psychology's focus on identifying and developing strengths aligns strongly with executive development and leadership coaching. Once leaders understand the logic and power of strengths-based approaches the reaction is often "but of course." However, taking for granted what's right is hard and looking for what's wrong is wired deep in our primordial brain.



Organizational psychologist and executive coach, Doug MacKie, delivers on the sub-title of *Strengths-Based Leadership Coaching in Organizations* with "an evidence based guide to positive leadership development."

Here's a few key points highly applicable to leaders and leadership development professionals concerned with our leadership development crisis:

- Research is showing that implementation rates of leadership training is about 10 percent – or likely less given the lack of rigorous evaluation.

- Talent/leadership development strategies can differ widely depending on whether leaders believe leadership skills are fairly fixed as innate traits (fixed mindset) or a belief they can be developed (growth mindset).
- Mindsets can be changed fairly quickly. The coachee's attitude toward learning and development predicts a fair bit of their developmental effectiveness.
- Coaching and positive psychology assume that people want to learn and many of their solutions are to be drawn out from within.
- Many leaders have little awareness of his or her own strengths and need feedback.
- When strengths-based approaches raise strength awareness and align them with organizational needs they can build leadership mastery.
- Managers who focus on building strengths in their direct reports significantly increase performance. Managers focusing on weaknesses reduce performance.
- A positive coaching culture is based on leaders believing employees can solve many of their own issues, fosters intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation, models strengths-based leadership, embeds positive principles in HR practices, and provides resources to support the culture.
- Strengths-based coaching is about asking the right questions, not providing the answers.
- Performance reviews most often reinforce negativity bias and focus on what's wrong to close gaps rather than focus on what's right and leverage strengths for higher performance.
- Strength building depends on organizational context such as what combination will maximize performance and which ones complement each other in particular situations.

The book is fairly academic and a dense read for a reader new to this type of approach. I quite enjoyed it because it's focused on areas of my own study and practice in bringing together research and best practices across the fields of strengths-based development, positive psychology, and executive coaching.

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:

Flip through Jack and Joe's slides from this webinar or click on the link to watch it.

"Focus on Strengths – What Extraordinary Leaders Do Differently" – Jack Zenger and Joe Folkman

"Given the pressing need for highly effective leaders in today's recovering economy, organizations are wise to seek the most direct way to develop strong leaders."

There's growing confusion between strengths, skills, values, passions, or talents and how to build strengths.

"3 Hard Truths About Developing Your Strengths" – Joe Folkman
www.forbes.com

"By turning your unique abilities into profound strengths, you become an extraordinary leader."

Joe draws key insights from studying 20,000 employees to see what leaders did to increase satisfaction with individual development.

"The 4 Vital Keys To Developing Others" -- Joe Folkman
www.forbes.com

"If you want your investment in development to flourish, then train your leaders to use these skills to help every employee have the positive growth experience they need and deserve."

Learn how quick AND effective are possible. You can also link to ZF's complimentary Pace Assessment to see how you're doing.

"The Traits of Leaders Who Do Things Fast and Well" -- " -- Jack Zenger and Joe Folkman,
Harvard Business Review

<https://hbr.org>

"Our analysis identified seven unique factors that appear to identify what it takes to combine these two seemingly contradictory critical leadership goals."

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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