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Brian's head was starting to throb as he scrolled through the two-dozen new voice and e-mail messages on his phone while walking to his cubicle. Looks like another crazy day in the hamster cage he muttered to himself. Brian, age 41, was growing increasingly frustrated. Despite working 50 hours and more per week (with an increasing amount of weekend work to "catch up"), it felt like his career wasn't going anywhere. Work that once energized him now left him drained. Brian felt that unreasonable customers, managers, and co-workers were speeding up his hamster wheel just to watch him run faster. He had little time with his family and no time left to look after his health and fitness.

Down the hall, Brian's boss was meeting with the HR director to review staffing for new roles and projects emerging from the recent organizational restructuring. They really needed a professional with Brian's technical skills to lead an important project team. "Brian's strong technically, but he's clearly not the person to lead this team," his manager reflected. "His ability to set priorities, inspire and engage people, and pull a team together are weak." "I agree," the HR director nodded. "He works hard but doesn't use his time well. I've also heard he's becoming more negative and cynical about all our organizational changes and new services."

Paradoxically, people who work harder, often get less done. As technology speeds up the flow of information and communications, less-effective people are swept away on a tidal wave of trivial urgencies and busyness. Failing to reflect and learn from their experiences before choosing their next course of action, they race around putting out multiple fires with little thought to fire prevention. They join the ranks of the stupid busy. Like painting a building with a toothbrush, they work very hard using the wrong approach.

Leaders with stunted growth often believe they are much more effective than others think they are. Their insecurity means they won't seek critical feedback on their own performance or personal behavior. Their "circle of delusion" is maintained by being unapproachable with criticism or suggestions. This leads to a belief that they're doing well because no one is telling them otherwise.

This issue provides you with ways to deal with key leadership issues such as those frustrating Brian. He's stupid busy and not making tough choices about the strategic use of his time. He's bringing this lack of discipline to any project team he leads.

Brian could pinpoint what's stifling his effectiveness and career growth by getting unfiltered feedback through a 360 assessment. But that feedback can also hurt leaders when it focuses more on what's wrong, gaps, and weaknesses. Most leaders don't put together rigorous personal development plans and stick with them when

centered on fixing weaknesses, and it's hard to leverage weaknesses. In this issue, you'll learn how another leader, Andy, pulled up a cluster of skills by lifting one of his key strengths.

Hope you take the time to reflect and refocus on how to be smart busy.

Poor Leaders Are Me-Deep in Fooling Themselves

André Gide, French writer and Nobel Prize winner for literature, said, "The true hypocrite is the one who ceases to perceive his deception, the one who lies with sincerity." Sincere hypocrisy came to mind when a workshop participant complained about how badly his manager and their bosses needed that very leadership development session. He said a big **moose-on-the-table** was how senior management at their company are "a major portion of the problem they are trying to address by paying for training so employees can perform better. For example, teamwork training is for the employees, not the managers! I have yet to see most managers follow any of the principles they pay to have us learn. They don't practice what they preach."

Getting leaders to recognize and deal with their own ineffective behavior -- and how they've sprouted moose antlers -- is a constant challenge. Rarely do ineffective managers attend a workshop where the ceiling opens up to a clap of thunder and lightning, and they suddenly realize, "Oh, my God. He's talking about me, and I need to change."

Leading @ the Speed of Change is one of our most popular keynotes and workshops. Sometimes organizational leaders want to change "them." They're aiming to **do it 'to' and not 'with' their team**. But many leaders are ignorantly innocent and don't recognize the disconnections between their words and their deeds.

The word 'hypocrisy' has part of its roots in a Greek word, meaning "to play a part, pretend." I have come to believe that there are two types of hypocrisy: (1) deceiving or being untrue to others; and, (2) deceiving or being untrue to myself. The first type of hypocrisy is basic dishonesty, an intentional attempt to fool someone else. The second type is more common. It's an unintentional form of self-hypocrisy. It often comes from a lack of feedback on how a leader's actions are perceived by others.

Zenger Folkman have had over 100,000 leaders assessed by more than one million direct reports, peers, managers, and others through their **360 assessment** and strengths-based development system. In this process, leaders assess themselves as well. They can then compare their self-assessment to the perception of everyone else. It turns out the leader's self-assessment is only half as reliable, correlated to results like employee engagement, profitability, productivity, safety, or customer service.

This unreliability underscores the value of a 360 assessment. By getting unfiltered and anonymous feedback on their leadership, leaders can stop deceiving themselves. This often helps him, or her understand what's at the root of frustration with poor workplace attitudes, poor teamwork, or low motivation levels.

At our youngest daughter's sixth birthday party, a five-year-old boy hit Vanessa on the head. Asked to apologize, he politely refused: "Mr. Clemmer, I don't apologize unless I see teeth marks or blood." Effective feedback

processes help managers reduce or stop inflicting pain through the innocent ignorance of self-deception – before they see teeth marks or blood.

Click here if you'd like to explore an upcoming chance for a 360 assessment and get help in building a strengths-based personal development plan.

Leadership Lift: Significantly Boost Effectiveness by Raising Strength Clusters

A block and tackle is a system of pulleys with a rope or cable threaded between them to lift heavy loads. This amplifies the force applied. With enough pulleys or by threading the rope through them a few times, you can pull on the rope and lift three, four, or more times the weight you'd be able to lift with just the rope alone or one pulley.
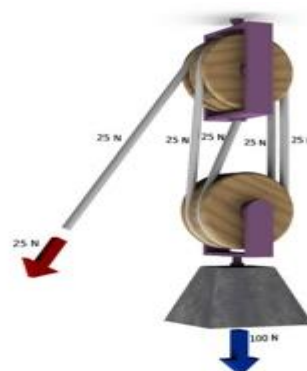
That same approach can apply to lifting our leadership skills. With the right system, we can pull up a set of skills that we couldn't raise up by drawing directly on one. For example, improving communications skills could be pulled up directly by increasing presentation effectiveness, using more stories, or explaining the why of your proposal. Threading the communication rope through the pulleys of "**competency companions**" can build relationships, coach rather than direct, involve others, or increase trust levels. This can raise a heavier combined load of leadership clusters and boast all of them. *And* you'll be seen as a better communicator.

Taking this approach amplified talent development professional, Andy Martin's, personal development plan based on his 360 feedback. As with many participants first using a strength-based leadership development approach, Andy had a tough time getting his mind wrapped around the idea of focusing on developing a strength rather than fixing the weaker areas highlighted in his feedback. That's a natural inclination. We're hardwired to notice gaps, what's wrong, and try to fix those. A lifetime of conditioning going back to our school days and continuing through performance appraisals train us to skip over positives and look more closely at negatives (for more see the research paper on **Developing Strengths or Weaknesses: Overcoming the Lure of the Wrong Choice**).

Andy decided to pull on the rope of a strength – Inspires and Motivates Others – to lift up a **cluster of competency companions**. After 12 to 14 months of working on his personal development plan, Andy was reassessed by his manager, peers, direct reports, and others in a follow up 360 assessment. He was delighted to see that Inspires and Motivates Others had risen significantly to the 90th percentile along with four other competencies. "I was blown away to see such a dramatic improvement from a laser focus on one item," Andy reports. **Click here to watch his three-minute video interview**.

Using a block and tackle system for cranes to lift heavy weights go back to Heron of Alexandria in the first century. They've been heavily used (pun intended!) ever since. Similar approaches to building strengths are more recent. We need to overcome centuries of conditioning to pull directly on weaknesses rather than leveraging our strengths. It's proving to be the best way to tackle leadership development.

Stupid Busy: Is Your Leadership Team Overloading Your Organization?

For decades, Harvard professor Michael Porter has studied, written about, and consulted top companies and countries on competitive strategy. He's found that "the essence of strategy is choosing what not to do."

A recent issue of *Harvard Business Review* features an article on "Too Many Projects." Authors Rose Hollister and Michael Watkins write, "Leaders keep layering on initiatives, which can lead to severe overload at levels below the executive team." This is a critical problem that's burning out managers and team members. Declining engagement and retention are just two symptoms of the problem.

Hollister and Watkins identify seven roots of this big leadership failure:

1. Impact blindness
2. Multiplier effects
3. Political logrolling
4. Unfunded mandates
5. Band-Aid initiatives
6. Cost myopia
7. Initiative inertia

Reflecting on a series of **offsite planning retreats** I've facilitated over the past few months with executive teams and a board of directors, this article is especially timely and relevant. It's about discipline, focus, and making hard choices.

Here's what we find helps leadership teams get out of the stupid, busy death spiral they create through weak strategic leadership:

- **All Eyes on the Prize** -- agree what success looks like, what you value most, and why you exist
- **Behave Yourself** -- define the leadership behaviors that reduce eye-rolling and snickering and show it's not just more yadda yadda
- **Pull Yourself Together** -- get your team working together and stop undermining each other once you leave meeting rooms
- **Kill Lists** -- identify meetings, projects, initiatives, sloppy e-mail habits, committees, and strategies to chop or sharply reduce
- **Choose 'Em and Lose 'Em** -- pick the two or three (four tops) strategic (high leverage) imperatives (must-do) with the highest potential, and park or kill the others
- **Get Serious** -- put your top leaders and best cross-functional teams together and give them the mandate and resources to deliver on your Strategic Imperatives
- **Reduce the Moose** -- use an anonymous and confidential process to raise the key issues/barriers (moose, elephants, or 800-pound gorillas); secretly vote on the top 3 or 4, and address them
- **Culture Rift, Drift, or Shift** -- the best strategies and plans die if the leadership team doesn't define and actively shape the culture that boosts or blocks implementation

Getting your leadership team away from daily operations for a few days of reflection and planning is incredibly effective. I am clearly biased since I've facilitated so many retreats; when offsite retreats are well designed and facilitated (a bit more bias), the return on investment is exponential.

Facebook COO, Sheryl Sandberg, has an impressive track record of getting things done. She said, "I strongly believe in ruthless prioritization. ...only focusing on the very best ideas. It means figuring out the 10 things on your list and, if you can't do all 10, doing the top two really well. Ruthlessly prioritizing can get hard because you're always trying to do more, but it's one of the best and most important ways to stay focused."

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:

More hard evidence that companies with the best environmental, social, and governance track records soar above their less responsible peers.

> **Why 'Good Guy' Stocks Can Help You Beat the Market** -- Ryan Derousseau, *Fortune*

Practical and useful steps for getting the most out of this powerful leadership development process.

> **How To Make 360-Degree Feedback A Great Experience** -- Jack Zenger, *Fortune*

Traditional 360 assessments erode confidence, pick at scabs, and reduce motivation to improve.

> **History Of 360s: Why We Moved From Focusing On Weaknesses To Strengths** -- Joe Folkman, *Forbes*

This is a critical leadership skill. Drawing on his research, Joe provides six simple ways to be more inspiring.

> **The Shocking Statistics Behind Uninspiring Leaders** --Joe Folkman, *Forbes*

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The **items in each month's issue of** *The Leader Letter* **are first published in my 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

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May the Force (of strengths) be with you!

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