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The Leader Letter

In its Human Capital Trends dashboard, Deloitte surveyed over 2,500 leaders in more than 90 countries who are concerned with talent management. The survey respondents see talent as a major challenge to growth. A few key findings were:



- *"Softer areas such as culture, engagement, leadership and development have become urgent priorities.*
- *Leadership and learning have dramatically increased in importance, but the capability gap is widening.*
- *HR organizations and skills are not keeping up with business needs."*

Research from Bersin by Deloitte also found that organizations with strong learning cultures were 92% more likely to develop innovative products or services and 52% more productive.

Many executives consider leadership and culture to be factors like strategy, structure, marketing, financial management that determine an organization's success. Decades of research now show that leadership and culture are catalytic agents. They have a multiplying effect that top leaders and organizations use as leverage on those other factors to elevate performance to the very peak of their industry.

This issue looks at a few crucial aspects of leadership and culture. You'll find a link to last month's webinar on key elements of leadership, coaching, and culture development. And we're now planning to drill deeper into those areas with a March 9 webinar on Executive Team Building and Culture Development.

Many leaders and leadership teams fall into 7 deadly time traps that drain their energy and effectiveness. This issue reports on how one team addressed a few key traps they'd fallen into.

Two of January's blogs published here looked at the futility of the yearly ritual of forecasting and predicting. The key is to strengthen leadership and culture to be much more agile and adaptive to change since predicting the future is impossible.

You'll also see how building on the uplifting forces of leadership strengths is much more effective than being drawn to the dark side of fixing weaknesses. As Ben Obi-Wan Kenobi famously told Luke Skywalker in the original Star Wars movie, "Use the Force, Luke."

Executive Team Building and Culture Development Webinar - March 9

Building off last month's webinar on **Essential Elements of Leadership, Coaching, and Culture Development** (click to [view in our archive](#)), we're now planning a webinar for March 9 on **Executive Team Building and Culture Development** (click for more details and to [register](#)).



Here's what we'll cover:

- **Strategic Organization/Culture Development:**
 - Building a common understanding/framework for leading change
 - Leadership is an action, not a position: Developing a culture with leaders at all levels
 - Balancing "hard" management systems/processes with "soft" leadership/people issues
 - Clarifying/revitalizing vision and core values
 - Lip service to leadership: Key behaviors to ripple throughout the culture
 - Team and organizational strengths to leverage and where the biggest shifts/changes are needed
 - Strategic Imperatives: Implementation planning around a few core initiatives
- **Leadership and Organization Development**
 - The leadership skills with the biggest impact on performance
 - Building and leveraging strengths instead of focusing on weaknesses -- unless a "fatal flaw" must be addressed
 - Using a simplified and strengths-based 360 leadership assessment for feedback that's much better received and acted on than traditional 360 tools
 - Developing "leadership sweet spots" that intersect strengths, passions, and an organization's need for development plans with much higher commitment
 - Applying an evidence-based, cross-training methodology to building leadership skills from good to great
 - Setting personal and team leadership development plans
- **Coaching and Organization Development**
 - The vital difference between training, mentoring, and coaching
 - The exponential impact of coaching skills on performance
 - Common coaching traps
 - How the four step FUEL framework guides coaching conversations and boosts performance impact
 - Building a coaching culture
 - Providing crucial reinforcing and redirecting feedback for greater growth and development
- **Team Building**
 - Working ON the team versus IN the team
 - Understanding team dynamics and dysfunctional team behavior
 - "Moose Hunting" with courageous conversations to address key team and organizational barriers
 - Using team norms/ground rules to reduce conflicts, silos, and fragmentation
 - Assessing and planning what the team should Keep, Start, and Stop Doing
 - Avoiding The Meeting Sinkhole and taming The E-mail Beast

[Click here](#) for more information and to register. Hope to "see you" online in March.

Strengthen Leadership Skills by Awakening the Force

During these rapidly changing times leadership skills are critical. Yet many studies show a profound dissatisfaction with leadership effectiveness across most organizations. And a vast majority of executives feel their leadership skill development efforts aren't effective.



A major part of the problem is that we're "**seduced by the dark side**" of fixing weaknesses or closing skills gaps. Over a decade of research shows that "**building leadership strengths is 2 - 3 times more effective than fixing weaknesses**". A recent survey from the positive psychology movement is pointing toward a "**strengths revolution in our workplaces**". But a lifetime of conditioning tells us that improvement comes from fixing our weaknesses. The dark side is strong and "**letting go of our weaknesses is really hard**". But when harnessed effectively, elevating leadership strengths is a powerful force that can build "**towering strengths to overshadow weaknesses**".

[Click here](#) to watch a two minute video clip taken from an overview of *The Extraordinary Leader* development process. This short clip on **The Well Rounded Leader and Weakness Trap** outlines a few reasons the pull of the dark side is so strong. Its argument ends with arguing for "the end of the weak."

May the force be with you...

Further Resources:

- **Focusing on Strengths resource section** (use "click to view" tabs to select blogs, whitepapers, webinars, or videos)
- **"Is Your Culture Anchored in Strengths or Weaknesses?"**
- **"Authentic Leadership Comes from Building Our Strengths"**
- **"Exceptional Leaders Aren't Well-Rounded"**
- **"Leveraging the Power of the Halo Effect"**
- **"Double Your Resolution Success by Building Strengths"**

Webinar on Key Elements of Leadership, Coaching, and Culture Development

Condensing 40 years of lessons learned into a 45 minute webcast was an invigorating challenge. A few months ago I stepped back for a long and broad look at hundreds of keynotes, workshops, and retreats we've delivered across a full range of industries and organizations in many countries. This led to a complete overhaul and update of the **Custom Keynotes & Workshops** and **Leadership Team Retreats** sections of our website.

Last month I further boiled our learning into **Essential Building Blocks for Leadership, Coaching, and Culture Development Webinar**. The webinar was structured around three core elements emerging from our work in leadership, coaching, and culture development:



From Inspiration to Application: Essential Building Blocks

Foundational frameworks, models, and definitions provide a strong base for development work. These are proving to be especially useful:

- Leadership is an action, not a position. We need strong leadership behaviors at all levels.
- Lead, follow, or wallow: critical choices to change or be changed.
- High-performance teams balance the discipline of systems, processes, and technology management on a base of effective people leadership.
- Three concentric rings of customer service build from the central requirements/standards of core services, to satisfying service support expectations, to delighting customers with enhanced service levels.

Elevating Leadership and Coaching Strengths

Research shows that helping leaders build strengths is up to 3 times more effective than focusing on weaknesses or closing skill gaps. We've believed that for years but lacked an evidence-based methodology to map out exactly how to leverage leadership strengths. Using *The Extraordinary Leader Development System* over the past three years we've learned a powerful new approach that challenges conventional wisdom.

Many coaching models we've used or developed prior to working with Zenger Folkman are based on sports coaching approaches and designed to provide training, give advice, mentor, solve problems, and set action plans. A core difference of *The Extraordinary Coach* approach is moving leaders from telling, directing, and giving advice to asking non-leading and open-ended questions that guide the conversation so both coach and coachee learn, arrive at a better solution, and ultimately the coachee owns the outcome.

Strengthening People and Processes through Culture Development

We've found this simple formula is key to lasting and effective leadership and organization development; **B = P x C**. That is, **B**ehavior is a factor of **P**ersonal development multiplied by the organization's **C**ulture. Core models and approaches that have proven most useful are:

- Compass model: Six Core Components for a Peak Performance Culture
- Five Steps to Our Desired Culture
- The Five Stage Commitment Continuum
- Bringing Alive Vision, Core Values, and Purpose/Mission

It was a fast-paced 45 minute overview of these three core elements followed by a short period of questions and discussion. If you're a senior HR, OD, L & D professional or senior operating executive concerned about these vital development issues [click here to watch the archived webinar](#).

Great Leaders Nearly Double Satisfaction with Pay and Job Security

Have you ever been stressed out by a bad boss? If it was bad enough you likely found yourself saying "they can't

pay me enough to put up with this." At the other extreme, have you been part of a team led by an outstanding leader? Did the spirit of we-can-conquer-all, electric energy, and stretch goals achieved leave you feeling "and I get a paid for having all this fun too. I love coming to work!"?



Such is the huge positive or negative impact of leadership. This chart correlates data from organizational satisfaction surveys on pay and job security with 360 data on leadership effectiveness. Survey respondents are in the same organization under the same pay systems and organizational circumstances. The key variable is the effectiveness of their boss. There's a very big gap between the very worst and the very best leaders. Even the difference between good leaders in the middle of the chart and great leaders at the 90th percentile is significant.

Leadership Effectiveness vs. Satisfaction with Pay and Job Security



This is consistent with research just reported in Harvard Business School's *Working Knowledge* newsletter article, "Is it Worth a Pay Cut to Work for a Great Manager?" The researchers looked at football and baseball managers to measure the impact of their leadership on team and individual performance. They concluded:

- Whether in sports or business the right manager can increase your value even if your pay is less.
- Strong managers enhance employee performance and add significant value to organizations.
- When a highly effective manager takes over a team the average player's performance relative to their lifetime statistics is greater than with a less effective manager.
- Great coaches teach teams how to win and players achieve their highest potential.
- Great managers put their players in situations where they have the highest chance of success.
- Through training and motivation average players can become rising superstars.
- Great corporate leaders provide a competitive advantage through attracting, leveraging, and retaining talented employees at lower overall cost.

Overcoming The 7 Deadly Time Traps for Leaders

In a recent **Leadership Team Retreat** we used a survey based on "**7 Deadly Time Traps for Leaders**". The biggest trap this team fell into was Acceleration and Overload. This was closely followed by Reactive and Busyness and Coaching Skills. We agreed these three areas were intertwined. These were creating a growing sense of frantic urgency and stress within this team and rippling throughout the company.



In discussing research on the best practices of top performing organizations the team realized they badly needed to establish a more disciplined pruning process. As Jim Collins writes in *Good to Great*, "most of us lead busy but undisciplined lives. We have ever-expanding 'to do' lists, trying to build momentum by doing, doing, doing -- and doing more. And it rarely works. Those who built the good-to-great companies, however, made as much use of 'stop doing' lists as 'to do' lists. They displayed a remarkable discipline to unplug all sorts of extraneous junk." The team decided to initiate "kill meetings" and a project termination process. This would include reviewing key processes and products to trim out "all the white noise" and distractions.

It also became apparent that low coaching skills were trapping leaders in the **Manager-Employee Dependence Spin Cycle**. They needed a coaching framework and skill development to **get the monkeys off their back and create empowerment and growth**.

Taming "The E-mail Beast" and improving meeting effectiveness were also identified as vital steps in reclaiming their time and effectiveness.

A key theme through the retreat and these action plans was the importance of more regular offsite retreats to continue their strategic focus and team/leadership development. Far too many leadership teams are caught in ever faster spirals of crazy busyness. This team realized there's much more to leadership effectiveness than increasing their speed.

How about your leadership team? Which traps are you falling headlong into? What's your plan for overcoming them?

Further Reading:

- "**Harnessing the Power of an Offsite Retreat**"
- "**The Acceleration Trap: Frantic Busyness and Priority Overload is Overwhelming Way Too Many Teams and Organizations**"
- "**Video Clip: Working ON the Team versus IN the Team**"
- "**Tips for Taming the E-mail Beast**"
- **Goals and Priorities**
- "**Reclaim Your Time, Reclaim Your Life**"
- "**How Many Monkeys Are On Your Back?**"
- "**Use Virtual/Physical Meeting Effectiveness Checklists to Boost Their Effectiveness**"

Forget Forecasts and Predictions, Build an Agile Organization

A couple goes to a fair, where there's a large, impressive-looking machine. The husband puts in a coin and receives a card telling him his age and what kind of person he is. He reads it and gets excited. It says: "You're brilliant and charming. Women fall all over you." His wife grabs the card from him and turns it over. "Aha!" she crows, "they got your age wrong, too."



It's as predictable as champagne and the ball drop in Times Square on New Year's Eve. At the start of every year futurists, forecasters, and analysts line up with the seers, fortune tellers, and clairvoyants to prophesize what the coming year has in store for us. Instead of tea leaves, animal entrails, and crystal balls, the "experts" use data, charts, and complex theories. And they'll be wrong.

I keep an extensive database of failed predictions. I have collected hundreds of examples and dozens of studies showing the woeful record of forecasting. I'll share some of my all-time favorites in my next blog post.

When I hear an economist or any other forecaster making predictions, a voice in my head says, "Yeah, right! You have no idea what's going to happen." These ponderous forecasters remind me of a banner my cousin had hanging on the wall in his bedroom when we were kids: "If you're so smart, why aren't you rich?"

Why are these self-proclaimed "experts" working for someone else or just appearing as talking heads on news networks? If they're so prescient, why aren't they multi-billionaires running the most successful businesses or investment funds on earth? Or if they're altruistic, why aren't they directing humanitarian organizations in preparation for impending famines, wars, and natural disasters?

The great British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who led England during the Second World War, wryly reflected on his frustration in getting "expert" advice: "It's the ability to foretell what will happen tomorrow, next month and next year -- and to explain afterwards why it did not happen." British actor and writer Peter Ustinov echoes, "If the world should blow itself up, the last audible voice would be that of an expert saying it can't be done."

Rather than trying to guess the future, we need to build highly agile and flexible organizations to rapidly respond to and **lead at the speed of change**.

Research That Makes You Go Hmmm on... Forecasts and Predictions

"There is no reason anyone would want a computer in their home."

- Ken Olson in 1977 when he was president and founder of Digital Equipment Corp -- a pioneering computer company that no longer exists



"University of California political psychologist Philip Tetlock spent two decades asking foreign policy experts to make predictions about world events, and then

tracking their accuracy. In that time, he has assembled a database of more than 80,000 individual predictions by 284 experts. The result: Expertise and experience made very little difference (he published his findings in his book, Expert Political Judgment). Experts on the whole barely outperform a coin toss in predicting the future ... The best experts ... can get their success rate up to nearly 60 percent -- better than 'heads or tails,' but not by much."

- "A talk with Philip Tetlock: Expertise is overrated," Rick Heller, *The Boston Globe*

"The accuracy of an expert's predictions actually has an inverse relationship to his or her self-confidence, renown, and, beyond a certain point, depth of knowledge. People who follow current events by reading the papers and newsmagazines regularly can guess what is likely to happen about as accurately as the specialists whom the papers quote. Our system of expertise is completely inside out: it rewards bad judgments over good ones."

- "Everybody's An Expert: Putting predictions to the test," Louis Menand, *The New Yorker*

"Rail travel at high speeds is not possible because passengers, unable to breathe, would die of asphyxia."

- Dionysius Lardner, Professor of Natural Philosophy and Astronomy at University College, London, and author of *The Steam Engine Explained and Illustrated* (1830)

"Trouble is, despite their efforts, forecasters aren't particularly accurate and their track record isn't improving, particularly when it comes to predicting recessions. 'They tend to make the same forecasting mistakes,' said Merv Daub, professor emeritus at Queen's University's business school. 'Much of the process relies on guessing what will happen to external factors such as the global economic and political environment,' said Daub, who has extensively researched the accuracy of forecasting. 'How the hell do you forecast these things?' he said. 'Forecasters are not witches. They don't possess some mythical way of foreseeing the future.'"

- "The Prophets of Profit," Steven Theobald reporting on *The Toronto Star's* analysis of 20 years of mostly inaccurate annual forecasts

"Victor Zarnowitz, a professor at the University of Chicago and one of the leading trackers of economic forecasting accuracy, analyzed the error rates for six prominent economic forecasters -- the big three plus GE, the Bureau of Economic Analysis, and the National Bureau of Economic Research -- in predicting real gross national product (GNP) growth and inflation ... He found that of the forty-eight predictions made by the economists, forty-six missed the turning points in the economy ... Roy A. Batchelor and Pami Dua, professors at City University in London and the University of Connecticut, respectively... In analyzing the track records of thirty-two forecasters, they found almost no differences in forecast accuracy among the different economic schools of thought... "The Economist" was right to declare that economic forecasters 'are worse than useless: they can do actual long-term damage to the economy.'"

- *The Fortune Sellers: The Big Business of Buying and Selling Predictions*, William A. Sherden

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:

Research data on 11,954 leaders showing that leadership flows downhill and how senior leaders stimulate or stifle development.

"Does Your Boss Need Some Leadership Development?" -- Joe Folkman

www.forbes.com

"A leader's behavior not only impacts their immediate team, but also spreads to the next level of leaders. Clearly, great performance expands. (Unfortunately, however, poor performance spreads just as effectively.)"

Further evidence that leadership behaviors are highly contagious and ripple throughout the team or organization.

"The Trickle-Down Effect of Good (and Bad) Leadership" -- Jack Zenger and Joe Folkman

<https://hbr.org>

"If you're a good leader, do you make the people around you more likely to become good leaders as well? And which behaviors are most readily 'caught'?"

Discover why it is so important that leaders at all levels-- especially top executives -- pursue the ongoing practice of personal development.

Webinar: "World Class Executive Development - 4 Elements That Will Make Leadership Development More Successful!" -- Jack Zenger and Joe Folkman

www.zengerfolkman.com

As we are in the midst of cold and flu season Zenger Folkman has made a startling discovery, "Leadership is as contagious as the flu!"

This study shows the cascading impact of coaching skills and outlines three steps for improving effectiveness.

"To Avoid A Legacy Of Bad Leadership, Do This" -- Joe Folkman

www.forbes.com

Good coaches set the example for others to also be good coaches. By being a better coach you not only help your direct reports, but you also spread the influence of good coaching across the organization.

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!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jim".

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