



Issue 215 - February 2021



As legend has it, Alexander the Great was leading his forces across a scorching terrain. For eleven days, they marched on. The soldiers were exhausted, and their throats parched. On the twelfth day, the advance guard brought Alexander a helmet containing a cup or two of all the water they could find. The troops watched with envy as the water was presented to him.

Alexander never hesitated. He dumped the water on the hot sand. "It's no use for one to drink when many thirst," he said. His troops desperately needed water. But the water in that helmet was only a drop or two for each soldier. Alexander couldn't give them water. So, he gave them another vital sustenance -- inspiration. They found water later. At that moment, he energized them with leadership.

Some leaders inspire with words. The most powerful leaders inspire with action. They LOL -- lead out loud. What they do shouts so loud people don't hear what they're saying.

During an offsite retreat, the president of a major retailing chain talked about the importance of integrity and trust. Later in a discussion about management skill gaps, he expressed frustration that store managers weren't

In this Issue:

Muting the Messenger: What Leaders Do Silences What Leaders Say

Bit by Innocent Bit, Are You Becoming a Sincere Hypocrite?

Thoughts that Make You Go Hmmm on... Leadership Hypocrisy

Read *The Leader Letter* in Weekly Installments

Feedback and Follow-Up

"entrepreneurial enough" to keep extra merchandise shipped in error by external suppliers. "It's only fair," he explained, "These companies are always jerking us around." That afternoon as he claimed honesty and integrity were core values, I thought of Ralph Waldo Emerson's quip, "The louder he talked of his honor, the faster we counted our spoons."

One of the most infuriating things to emerge from our pandemic are glaring examples of hypocritical political leadership. I know, I know, the cynic in me wants to put that down as all too typical of the political game. But we've had numerous political leaders express enormous frustration that people aren't getting the message about following COVID protocols. Then we hear examples of leaders breaking many of the rules themselves -- when they think no one is looking. People get the message. They see it loud and clear. It can feel like we're trapped in a reality warp like the scene from the Groucho Marx movie, *Duck Soup*: "Who you going to believe, me, or your own eyes?"

Honesty and integrity are central to authentic leadership. Hypocritical leadership makes a mockery of that. It's then almost impossible for a leader to talk their way out of something they've behaved their way into.

The most effective communication is face-to-face. The most believable communication is behavior. Many leaders agree with that statement. However, leaders often judge themselves by their intentions. But the people they are leading can't see into their hearts. They only see -- and judge -- their actions.

This issue's focus is on leading by example. Muting the Messenger vents some of my frustration with hypocritical COVID leadership. It also looks at deceitful, versus sincere, hypocrisy. Lying with sincerity often results from the power and authority that slowly corrupts weaker leaders. From their positions of privilege, they think they're better than the people they're leading.

We'll also look at the creeping hypocrisy that creates blind spots. You'll find 10 ways to nurture a feedback-rich culture to check those blind spots. You'll also find a few thoughts that I hope will make you pause and consider whether your audio and video are out of sync.



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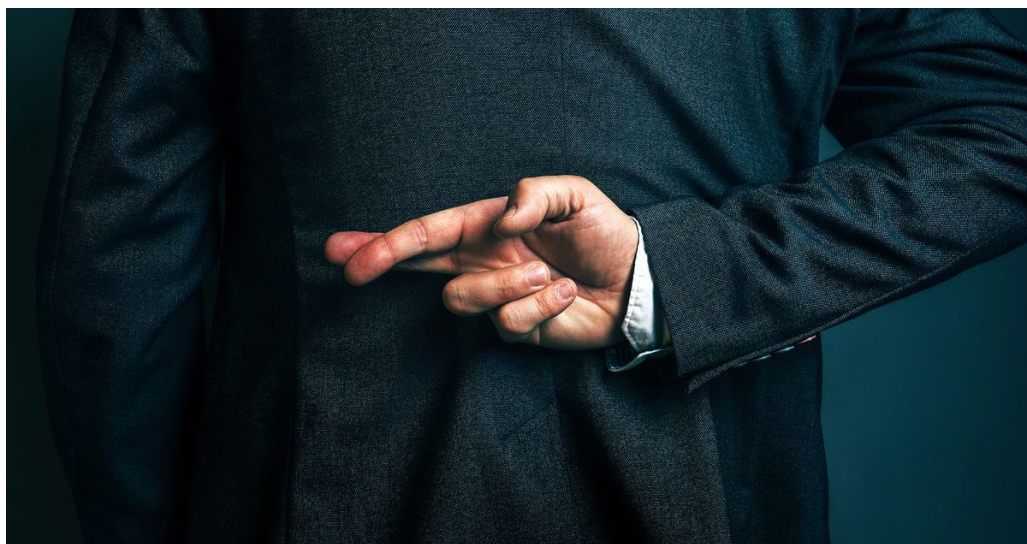
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Sean was filling out a university questionnaire to help determine roommate compatibility. Beside the questions, "Do you make your bed every day?" and "Do you consider yourself a neat person?" he checked "Yes." Later his mother reviewed the questionnaire. Knowing those answers were far from the truth, she asked Sean why he'd lied. "What do you expect me to do," he retorted. "I don't want to get stuck living with some slob!"

May this issue help you avoid becoming a hypocritical leadership slob.

Muting the Messenger: What Leaders Do Silences What Leaders Say



It's incredibly frustrating for our family to follow the COVID isolation rules while many families we know don't. What's been especially infuriating is seeing so many political leaders returning from out of country vacations. Most are directly violating the non-essential travel rules/guidelines drafted by their own governments -- for the rest of us little people.

How many more leaders just haven't been caught traveling or getting together during the holidays with people outside of their immediate household? Reminds me of the story of an applicant filling out a job application. When he came to the question, "Have you ever been arrested?" he wrote, "No." The next question, intended for people who had answered in the affirmative to the previous question, was "Why?" The applicant answered it anyway: "Never got caught."

This hypocrisy adds to the cynical view that "political principles" is an oxymoron right up there with clean coal, pretty ugly, retail service, or we're all in this together. But the CEO of a large healthcare organization who took

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a two-week Caribbean trip is remarkably mind-blowing. He's a medical doctor who's been a clinical chief, professor of medicine, and critical care director. His organization fired a nurse for flying to the US to visit her elderly parents two months ago. While he basked in the sun, frontline healthcare workers throughout the hospitals in his organization put their lives on the line to care for sick and dying COVID patients during Christmas. How's that for "we're all in this together?" Thankfully, he's suddenly no longer CEO nor on government COVID medical advisory boards.

How can a leader be so hypocritical? Hypocrisy is "the practice of professing beliefs, feelings, or virtues that one does not hold or possess; falseness." The word has its roots in part from a Greek word meaning, "to play a part, pretend." I 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 a form of fraud. It's an intentional attempt to fool others. The second type is sad. It's an unintentional lack of self-awareness. It's self-hypocrisy.

Hard to know which type of hypocrite this ex-CEO is. I am guessing it's self-hypocrisy born of the creeping elitism that can slowly seep in with increasing power. It's choosing the dark path of humility that decreases with every promotion and disappears completely in the C-Suite. In a chapter entitled "How Power Corrupts," in his book, *Humankind*, Rutger Bregman cites numerous studies of power's corrosive effects, including "Power Causes Brain Damage." He writes,

"a sense of power disrupts what is known as mirroring, a mental process which plays a key role in empathy... powerful individuals mirror much less. It is almost as if they no longer feel connected to their fellow human beings. As if they've come unplugged."

Richard Rumbold was a 17th century political radical executed for taking part in an attempt to overthrow King James II and VII of England, Ireland, and Scotland. His speech from the scaffold included the words, "none comes into the world with a saddle on his back, neither any booted and spurred to ride him."

Many outstanding leaders don't succumb to the creeping elitism that creates we/they gaps. In his extensive research on great leaders and

organizations, Jim Collins says the highest form of leadership is Level 5; "...a powerful mixture of personal humility and indomitable will."

An inspiring story about Lord Mountbatten illustrates what all-in-this-together truly looks like. He was born into the British nobility, was Supreme Allied Commander, Viceroy of India, among many other high society and key leadership positions of power. On a rainy day in 1943, a battalion was lined up waiting for Lord Mountbatten's inspection. The officers wore raincoats, but the troops had none. They were soaked. Mountbatten's car pulled up, and he emerged wearing a raincoat. After taking a few steps, he turned around and went back to the car to shed his raincoat. He then turned to make the inspection. The troops cheered.

Bit by Innocent Bit, Are You Becoming a Sincere Hypocrite?

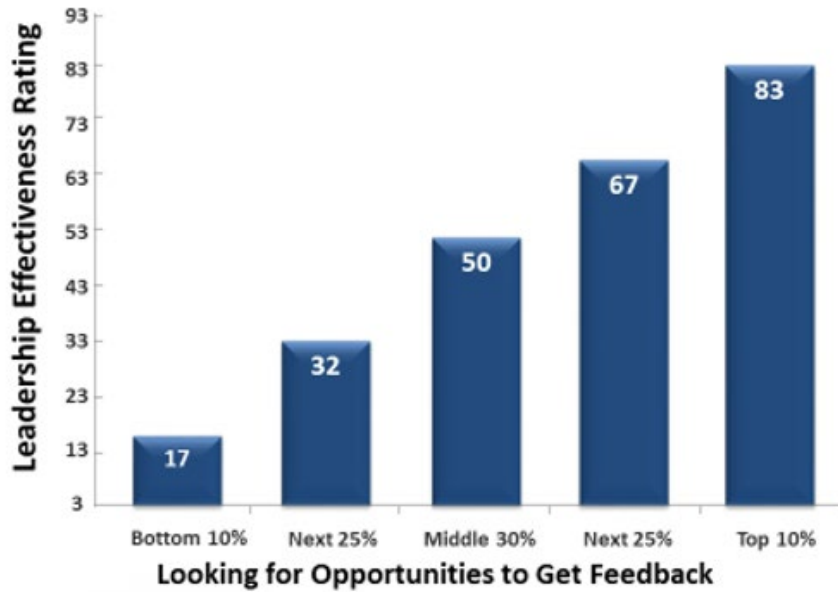


Most leaders don't live by the motto: "do what I say, not what I do." Their apparent hypocritical behavior is innocent and sincere. They simply don't know that their actions are seen as out of step with their words.

Not checking blind spots can lead to deadly highway accidents. Leaders who don't seek feedback often develop deadly blind spots. And when the crash happens, the blind leader is taken by surprise. "Why didn't anyone tell me about this sooner?"

Correlation studies drawing on Zenger Folkman's extensive 360 databases show the dramatic impact of a leader's inclination to ask for feedback and leadership effectiveness. The blindest leaders who actively discourage feedback may be blissful in their ignorance -- and highly ineffective. Their counterparts at the opposite end of the feedback spectrum -- with their eyes and ears wide open -- are over four times more effective.

Looking for Feedback and Leadership Effectiveness



What you do speaks so loudly people can't hear what you're saying. Here are a few ways you can check your blind spots and build a feedback-rich culture:

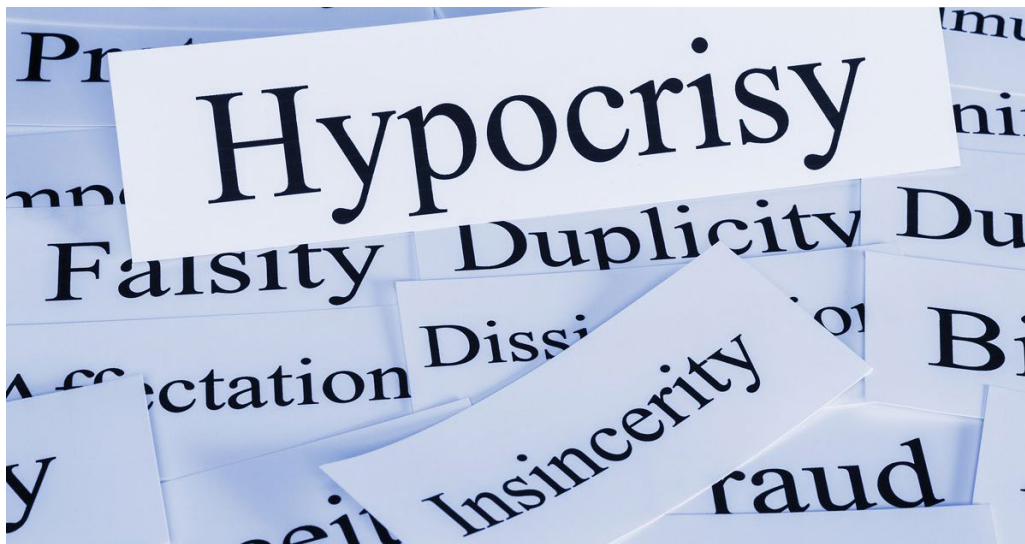
- Get unfiltered and anonymous feedback on your leadership effectiveness with **360 assessments**. Build personal and team development plans around that feedback that leverages strengths and addresses any **fatal flaws**.
- Use an external **coach** to leverage your strengths in building a personal development plan from a feedback assessment.
- Turn feedback into **change** through acceptance, prioritization, and action planning.
- When completing a direct report's performance appraisal, ask for input on your own behavior (and the effectiveness of that coaching).
- Run focus groups using a cross-section of people in your organization. A neutral facilitator can prepare a report summarizing the feedback.
- Periodically do group assessments of your **meeting effectiveness**. Ask what you should keep, stop, or start doing to make your work together more effective.
- Get an assessment from external consultants based on some combination of surveys, reviews, focus groups, and customer feedback.
- Network informally among peers in and out of your organization. Seek input on everything from personal observations to rumors they've heard about you.

- Watch for **signs** of moose-on-the-table such as lack of follow-through, real conversations happening outside the meeting, shunning personal
- accountability, blame-storming, sudden surprises erupting into major problems, etc.

Many leaders don't know they're raising the snicker factor. Bit by innocent bit they're seen as a hypocrite. Strong feedback channels and practices are vital to avoiding this problem and boosting leadership effectiveness.

French author and Nobel Prize winner in Literature, André Gide, said, "The true hypocrite is the one who ceases to perceive his deception, the one who lies with sincerity." Are your actions contradicting your words? How do you know?

Thoughts that Make You Go Hmmm on...Leadership Hypocrisy



"A baker suspected that the farmer who was supplying his butter was giving him short weight. He carefully checked the weight and his suspicions were confirmed. Highly indignant, he had the farmer arrested. At the trial the judge was satisfied and the baker chagrined at the farmer's explanation. He (the farmer) had no scales so he used balances and for a weight he used a one-pound loaf of bread bought daily from the baker."

- Zig Ziglar, *See You at the Top*

"I make mistakes. I'll be the second to admit it."

- Jean Kerr, Author, and Playwright

"People who are honest and straightforward with others tend to be honest and straightforward about themselves, but those who shade the truth (even slightly) with others have the same tendency to shade the truth about themselves. Those who deceive others tend to deceive themselves as well. They not only lie to themselves, but they soon believe their own lies."

- Joseph Folkman, *The Power of Feedback: 35 Principles for Turning Feedback from Others into Personal and Professional Change*

An industrial magnate once told Mark Twain he would like to climb Mount Sinai and read aloud the Ten Commandments. "Why don't you just stay home and live them," Twain replied.

"And the lectures you deliver may be very wise and true;
But I'd rather get my lesson by observing what you do.
For I may misunderstand you and the high advice you give;
But there's no misunderstanding how you act and how you live."

- Edgar A. Guest, British-born American poet known as the People's Poet

"Sometimes you have to be silent to be heard."

- Stanislaw J. Lec, Polish writer

"The cruelest lies are often told in silence."

- Robert Lewis Stevenson, Scottish novelist, poet, and travel writer

"The old saws, that effective leaders "model the way" or "walk the talk" are 100 percent accurate...The day-to-day stuff and big stuff matter far less than the micro-embodiments of "the way we do things around here" (e.g., the boss's thirty-second exchange with Jane or Jack in the hall on the way out of the meeting)."

- Tom Peters, *The Excellence Dividend*

"I have opinions of my own -- strong opinions -- but I don't always agree with them."

- George H.W. Bush, 41st U.S. President

Bridging the Distance: Reading, Leading, and Succeeding



Leaders bring hope, optimism, and positive action. That's really tough to do while social distancing and facing an uncertain future. We multiply misery if we allow the pessimism plague to infect us as well.

To counter Headline Stress Disorder and strengthen resilience, I actively scan a list of resources for research, articles, and tips on leading ourselves and others through these turbulent times. I post those articles every day.

Let's shorten our social media distancing. Follow or connect with me:

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Together we can Learn, Laugh, Love, and Lead -- just for the L of it!

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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 his or her permission. I am also happy to explore customized, in-house adaptations (online these days) 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**!

Let's leverage our leadership strengths to work together and get through this challenging time.



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