

Jim Clemmer's Leader Letter



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[Online Version](#)

[Past Issues](#)

[Practical Leadership Blog](#)

In this issue...

January 2010, Issue 82

[Five Resolutions to Lead, Not Follow or Wallow in 2010](#)

[New Habits for the New Year: Move Beyond Wallowing and Following to Leading](#)

["Thriving in Turbulent Times" Archived Webcast and Slides Download Now Available](#)

[Further Thoughts on Quantum Mechanics and What's the Real World?](#)

[Thoughts That Make You Go Hmmm...on Possibility Thinking](#)

[Overcoming Change Fatigue and Building Resilient and Flexible Teams/Organizations](#)

["Leading @ the Speed of Change" Webcast February 12th](#)

[The Learning Paradox: Slow Down to Grow Faster](#)

[Leading in Turbulent Times: Building Flexible and Resilient Organizations](#)

[Radio Interview on Key Concepts Behind *Growing @ the Speed of Change* Now Available](#)

[Do You See What I See: Nuances of *Growing @ the Speed of Change* Reviews](#)

[Integrating Succession Planning, Culture Change, and Executive Team Development](#)

[Let's Connect With LinkedIn Leadership Lessons from Santa](#)

[Read It Here or Hot Off My Blog](#)

[Most Popular December Improvement Points](#)

[Feedback and Follow-Up](#)

JANUARY 2010, ISSUE 82



Happy New Year! It's been said that an optimist stays up until midnight to see the New Year in and a pessimist stays up to make sure the old year leaves. Given the economic difficulties of 2009 many people (both optimists and pessimists) were happy to wave the year a hearty good-bye.

Now a fresh new year - and a whole new decade - is stretching out in front of us. It's a wonderful time of endless possibilities and limitless potential. It's a clean white canvas inviting us to paint the next big scenes in our lives.

This New Year issue is chockfull of inspiration, ideas, examples, and habit forming action plans. May 2010 be your best year yet!

FIVE RESOLUTIONS TO LEAD, NOT FOLLOW OR WALLOW IN 2010

Too often the New Year is just a new start for old habits. Here are six resolutions or personal growth goals to help you get a new start on new - or renewed - habits.

- Practice optimism and staying positive through set backs and constant change.
- Recognize and take early steps to avoid getting pulled down by uncertainty, organizational change, or negative stress and energy.
- Use technology as an enabling tool, don't let it drive you. Don't confuse information (such as e-mail) with communication (having conversations). Beware of the differences and use the right approach for each situation.
- Align and play to your strengths. Explore and know your strengths to assure you're in the right career/assignment/project to consistently bring out your best.
- Build connections, networks, and your personal brand. Make continual deposits in your relationship bank accounts to influence change, strengthen teamwork, and grow your support systems.
- Keep yourself growing through continuous personal improvement. Recognize the signs of career/personal stagnation and strengthening habits of personal growth.

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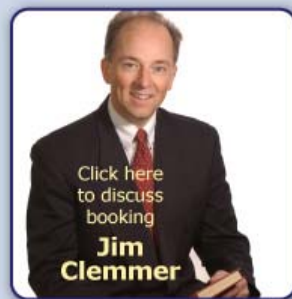
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Artists mix just three primary colors to paint their masterpieces filled with a vast array of hues, shapes, and details that evoke the full spectrum of human emotions. We too have three primary choices to mix, match, and shape each minute, hour, and day. Those choices evoke a range of emotions and responses in us and others.

Our basic choices are to lead, follow, or wallow. These choices are especially critical - and most difficult - when we experience setbacks, negative change, or crisis points in our personal and professional lives.

Lead

That means taking the initiative to make the best of a bad hand that's been dealt. It's living with ambiguity and paradox while exploring and creating a broad array of options. It's facing tough times squarely and not sugarcoating things or fleeing from difficult situations or touchy conversations. To lead is to focus beyond what is to what could be. Leading involves gratitude and looking for opportunities to celebrate and recognize progress. When we're leading we're thinking "I am going to do something about this," "How can I capitalize on this change?" or "I've overcome problems before and I can do it again."

Follow

When faced with a setback, major change, or difficulty, many people sit in following mode. This often involves waiting to see what else might happen. Following means looking to others for direction. On the up side, following might mean analyzing the situation to understand what happened and what the options are in dealing with it. On the down side, following means feeling helpless and cynical. When we're following we're thinking "Somebody should do something about this," "I am not sure what to do next," or, "I am just lying low, keeping my head down."

Wallow

To wallow is to take a bad situation and make it worse. Wallowing often involves searching for someone to point the finger at. One sign of wallowing is to crave certainty and long for the "good old days." Wallowing causes us to be overwhelmed by the problem and narrow our field of vision to few or no options. To wallow is to be a victim. There's a feeling of helplessness and conspiracies with lots of "they" talk; "They are out to get us," "They don't understand" or "They never listen to us."

[Click here](#) for a quick quiz on whether you tend to mostly lead, follow, or wallow.

NEW HABITS FOR THE NEW YEAR: MOVE BEYOND WALLOWING AND FOLLOWING TO LEADING

A New Year's resolution is too often a good intention that goes in one year and out the other. To change habits we need inspiration and action - or "inspir-action." Here are action steps to build habits that continually move us out of wallowing, beyond following, to leading:

- This is the perfect time of year to harness the magnetic power of imagery and visualization. Describe what your ideal life would look like if things were going extremely well three to five years from now. Outline your perfect job. Envision your ideal family life. See yourself helping to build whatever communities you're now part of. Visualize a strong and secure financial situation. Imagine your preferred social circle. Feel an even stronger

connection to your philosophical or spiritual beliefs. See your optimum health or physical condition. Include your spouse or "significant other" as a joint exercise; two visualizations are probably better than one.

- When faced with a crisis or very negative change, recall or even list times in the past when you overcame problems as bad as or worse than this one. What can you draw from those experiences? Can they at least help you keep this problem in perspective?
- Unless you're trying to influence them, spend as little time as possible with pessimists who continually complain and dwell on all that's wrong. Seek out optimistic people who focus on finding solutions and moving forward.
- Develop or join a network of colleagues interested in personal growth. This can be a powerful source of learning from others' experiences. It's also a great way for you to reflect on your own experiences and articulate your improvement plans.
- Find a personal coach or counselor to guide your personal development. He or she can be a sounding board, gather feedback from those you work with, prod you to reach your goals, provide advice, and encourage you.
- Catch and stop yourself from saying things like, "I am too old to change," "That's just the way I am," or "There's nothing I can do." Identify those habits or characteristics you'd most like to change. Now develop a series of positive affirmations as if it's already happening. For example, "I am," "I love to", or "I can" Post your affirmative statements built around your visualization where you'll see them every day. You could use them as screensavers, or put Post-It-Notes in your work space, bathroom mirror, car, wallet, purse, briefcase, or day planner.

"THRIVING IN TURBULENT TIMES" ARCHIVED WEBCAST AND SLIDES DOWNLOAD NOW AVAILABLE

After a few technical glitches - which raised our stress and adrenaline levels to heightened excitement - during our practice sessions leading up to the December 3rd webcast it finally did come off flawlessly. We had nearly 900 people register for the webcast. Since there were no fees or financial commitments involved, we knew not everyone would join us as busyness got in the way. Ironically I did touch on the problem of being overwhelmed and too busy for what's really important!

547 sites logged on for the webcast with over 95% staying on for the full 58-minute webcast. I'll take that to mean the vast majority of participants felt it was worth investing their time. They must have felt they were getting much more value than they paid for the session.

A large number of those sites had groups of participants tuned in together with the visual feed (slides) projected on large meeting room screens. Here's an e-mail from the director of service excellence and organization development at a U.S. health system:

"We had a big group from a few of our sites gathered together for your webinar. We invited formal leaders and told them to invite 'high performers.' The rooms were filled with all different employees. Formal leaders, supervisors, wonderful high-performing staff (who needed and deserved the great boost you gave them) and some not so high performers who I hope left with a lot to think about!!!!"

At the end of the session, I asked what they thought about it. Overwhelmingly positive! They want more!!! We had a quick debrief session - I asked them what would be the responses to the webinar of a 'leader', 'follower' and 'wallower.' They got it!!!!!!"

The live webcast consisted of my voice through an audio broadcast synchronized with my slides full of the usual animations and transitions I use when presenting in front of a group. Many participants asked for a copy of the slides to refer back to. Typical was this request from the VP of a logistics services company:

"I was wondering if we might be able to get an electronic version of the information so we can do some things in management meetings over the course of the next year to keep the ideas alive."

Whether you were a registered webcast participant or not, you can now [download a PDF file of all the slides used in the presentation](#) from our web site. We also received many regrets from people who couldn't make the live broadcast but wanted to see it. We now have the broadcast [available on our site for viewing as streaming audio and video or download the WMV file](#) to your computer.

When you visit our "[Thriving in Turbulent Times](#)" [webcast page](#) you'll also see the agenda of what was covered to help you decide whether or how to view the webcast. [Click here](#) to access the webcast page.

The webcast is also available as a free podcast download from iTunes. [Click here](#) to access it.

So you can catch the webcast on your own time, show it at your next team meeting, or bring people together for a shared learning experience and do the assessment/discussion exercises recommended in the presentation.

FURTHER THOUGHTS ON QUANTUM MECHANICS AND WHAT'S THE REAL WORLD?

Tis the season for predictions. It's impossible to know what lies ahead. What's clear is that our understanding of reality, consciousness, and energy fields will keep evolving at lightning speed over this coming decade.

Science is rapidly redefining the blurry lines of reality and fantasy. My blog post on "Quantum Mechanics: Now What's the Real World?" (also in the [December issue](#) of *The Leader Letter*) invoked an insightful response from my Canadian Association of Professional Speaking colleague, Ravi Tangri. [Click here](#) to read my post and Ravi's insights - and add your own.

THOUGHTS THAT MAKE YOU GO HMMM...ON POSSIBILITY THINKING

"The future is simply infinite possibility waiting to happen. What it waits on is human imagination to crystallize its possibility."

- Leland Kaiser, American author and futurist

"Even a thought, even a possibility, can shatter and transform us."

- Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, 19th Century German philosopher

"One must have the adventurous daring to accept oneself as a bundle of possibilities and undertake the most interesting game in the world - making the most of one's best."

- Harry Emerson Fosdick, 20th Century American clergyman

"When I examine myself and my methods of thought, I come to the conclusion that the gift of fantasy has meant more to me than my talent for absorbing positive knowledge."

- Albert Einstein, German-born American theoretical physicist

"...the mind of Man contains the greatest of all forces....Thought is one of the greatest manifestations of energy...not only is one's body subject to the control of the mind, but that, also, one may change environment, 'luck,' circumstances...Man is rapidly growing into a new plane of consciousness...there is an Infinite Power in, and of, all things...today we have the faintest idea of that Power, still we steadily grow to comprehend it more fully - will get in closer touch with it. Even now we have momentary glimpses of its existence - a momentary consciousness of Oneness with the Absolute."
- William Atkinson, editor of *New Thought* magazine, published in 1901 entitled "Thought Vibration or the Law of Attraction in the Thought World"

"...nurturing a fantasy is the first step in the neural process of achieving success in the world. It begins with creative imagination, a process that takes place in the frontal lobe, the area in your brain that has the unrelenting capacity to dream up virtually anything. If you can't imagine a specific goal, you won't make it to second base, which is figuring out how to make your dream come true."
- Andrew Newberg, M.D. and Mark Robert Waldman, *How God Changes our Brain: Breakthrough Findings from a Leading Neuroscientist*

Around this time of year Heather and I do our joint visioning for the coming years. It's a New Year's tradition we started years ago that made an enormous difference in keeping ourselves focused and keeping our life and business partnership growing ever stronger.
[Click here](#) to browse a collection of my articles on personal vision, values, and purpose.

OVERCOMING CHANGE FATIGUE AND BUILDING RESILIENT AND FLEXIBLE TEAMS/ORGANIZATIONS

Many managers, HR/Training/Safety and other support professionals, as well as team leaders are struggling with how to help people deal with constant change. More and more people are complaining of "change fatigue" as organizations deal with:

- Continuous changes in leadership, direction, processes, and organization structure.
- Relentless pressure to do more with less to meet ever increasing customer demands.
- Accelerating cycles of new technologies, methods, and approaches.
- A rapidly shifting workforce with a new generation of employees bringing different expectations.
- Unceasing pressure to continuously innovate and grow in response to global competition.

[My December "Thriving in Turbulent Times" webcast](#) focused on the issue of constant change and provides a variety of ways to address it. Following are a few key points covered to help people in your team or organization deal with the accelerating pace of constant change. You can use these points as a checklist for a quick "check up from the neck up," team assessment, or reflecting on your organization culture:

- We thrive on turbulence by growing for it. Whether sudden and unexpected changes are deadly threats or growth opportunities depends on how we respond.
- There's no "getting through this crazy period" to some mythical place of predictable stability.

- We must change or be changed. If the rate of external change exceeds our rate of internal change, we are eventually going to be changed.
- When faced with tough changes, set backs, or crisis points our basic choices are to lead, follow, or wallow.
- Our *attitude* more than our *aptitude* determines our *altitude*.
- Leadership is action, not a position. We need dramatically increased and widely shared leadership throughout our entire organization at all levels and in all roles.
- In dealing with change, uncertainty, and turbulence we can increase leading behaviors among team members by reminding each other to "stay off the Bitter Bus and out of Pity City."
- Visualization/Imagery, Values/Strengths, and Affirmations/Gratitude set up powerful magnetic fields that attract the positive or negative people, events, or circumstances toward us.

It's easy to slip slowly off track and not realize it or suddenly have a rude awakening on how we've lost our way. In the "[Thriving in Turbulent Times](#)" [webcast](#) I quoted the famous American frontiersman, Daniel Boone; "*I can't say I was ever lost. But I was bewildered once for three days.*" Of course, being a real he-man he likely didn't ask for directions!

"LEADING @ THE SPEED OF CHANGE" WEBCAST FEBRUARY 12TH

If you took part in my December "Thriving in Turbulent Times" webcast or are one of the thousands who watched the [archived version](#), downloaded the video file from the site or picked it up through iTunes, then you should again mark your calendar for another free webcast on February 12th from 2:00 - 3:00 EST. If you haven't participated so far then here's your chance to get involved!

"Leading @ the Speed of Change" will carry on from where "Thriving in Turbulent Times" left off. This broadcast is especially relevant for team leaders, supervisors, or executives leading change in their teams or organizations.

THE LEARNING PARADOX: SLOW DOWN TO GROW FASTER

A recent report on crowd control techniques provides a powerful learning reminder for us as we rush into 2010. A major - and sometimes deadly - problem at many large venues with huge crowds such as stadiums or concerts is everyone jamming the exits when it's time to leave. Engineers in Japan have found a counterintuitive solution; obstacles speed up the pressing hoards of people eager to get home. Strategically placed obstacles slow the crowd down just enough to better control the flow of people through narrower exits points. This allows more people to exit more quickly.

This is similar to the common problem of being too rushed or busy to learn. The American writer and futurist, Alvin Toffler observed, "The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn." I've spent decades listening to people explain that they just don't have time for personal learning or investing in training and organizational development. As they get busier, they have even less time for learning. As they have less time for learning, they need to work harder because the tools and skills they are using get ever duller. As they work harder and faster using old ideas, methods, and approaches, there's even less time to learn how to be more effective. This spiral leads down the slippery slope into the swamp of Wallow Hallow.

I contrast this all-too-common "victim" approach with highly effective people, teams, and organizations I've been privileged to work with. They have reversed the vicious busy circle into a virtuous circle of continuous growth and development, leading to ever more effectiveness which leads to less crazy-busyness and more time to learn. Here's how Barry Chow, a Client who's built a highly successful business in Calgary, Alberta, puts it:

"'I don't have time to learn,' is actually equivalent to 'I don't have time to improve.' This is poison to both our professional development and to our own fulfillment as individuals.

'Learning' is sometimes easy to dismiss, whereas 'improving' is an unarguably desirable goal that leaves no wiggle-room for procrastination. Learning isn't just some necessary evil that we were finished with after our schooling, but a lifelong process that is indispensable to our continuing growth and improvement as human beings."

By slowing down, learning, refocusing, and being more strategic in how we use our time we can actually speed up our effectiveness.

LEADING IN TURBULENT TIMES: BUILDING FLEXIBLE AND RESILIENT ORGANIZATIONS

If you're in the Toronto area, join me for a breakfast presentation from 7:30 a.m. - 9:30 a.m. on February 23, 2010 at The National Club on Bay Street (between King and Adelaide). This event is hosted by The Strategic Capability Network. [Click here](#) for an outline of what I'll be covering and to register.

Check out the outline to see if you might want to talk with me about delivering a customized version of this presentation for your organization either in person or through a webcast.

RADIO INTERVIEW ON KEY CONCEPTS BEHIND GROWING @ THE SPEED OF CHANGE NOW AVAILABLE

I had a wide-ranging interview with Bob McLean, a 52-year icon of the broadcasting business (including years at CBC), who thoroughly dug into *Growing @ the Speed of Change*. I knew I was in for a really engaging and in-depth interview when I arrived at the radio station to meet Bob and saw that his copy of my book was worn, dog-eared, and full of notes. I told him that nothing warms an author's heart more than seeing his book with those signs of heavy usage. [Click here](#) for an outline of what we covered and to listen to the interview.

DO YOU SEE WHAT I SEE: NUANCES OF GROWING @ THE SPEED OF CHANGE REVIEWS

Besides feeding (and sometimes bruising) my ego, the reviews for [Growing @ the Speed of Change](#) are incredibly fascinating to me. After laboring over it for hundreds of hours, it's extremely interesting to see what key points readers are taking from the book. Sometimes a reader will find some message or meaning from a passage I didn't intend to put there. Other readers will completely skip, miss, or not care about what I intended to be the key point of a section or chapter.

[Click here](#) to browse the reviews for *Growing @ the Speed of Change*. If you've read the book, please send me your thoughts on the key messages, ideas, or implementation tips and techniques that most stood out or were most helpful to you. My e-mail is Jim.Clemmer@Clemmer.net.

INTEGRATING SUCCESSION PLANNING, CULTURE CHANGE, AND EXECUTIVE TEAM DEVELOPMENT

The effectiveness of Learning and Development, HR tools and technologies, competency models, engagement programs, performance management systems, or succession planning hinges on the organization's culture. Partial and piecemeal programs bolted onto operational practices are dramatically less effective than processes integrated into "the way we do things around here." That culture ripples out from individual and collective executive team behavior.

This is the focus of my one-hour presentation on January 28th at the Human Resources Professionals Association (HRPA) annual conference this month in Toronto. [Click here](#) for details. If you're attending the conference, drop by the bookstore earlier in the day to meet me and get a complimentary signed copy of *Growing @ the Speed of Change*. This is your inside scoop to learn that only a small number of copies are available on a first-come-first-served basis

LET'S CONNECT WITH LINKEDIN

I am steadily increasing my use of LinkedIn to reconnect with so many past Clients, workshop participants, or readers I've lost touch with over the years and tap into interesting group discussions on personal, team, and organizational leadership. I've been updating and adding to my LinkedIn profile and utilizing its growing number of features such as connecting it to my [blog](#) and [Twitter feed](#) through Status Updates. I plan to add some of my presentation slides to SlideShare and use other features the site is now adding regularly.

As a [blog](#) and *Leader Letter* reader, I'd love to connect with you. My profile is at <http://ca.linkedin.com/in/jimclemmer>. Click on "View Full Profile." Please send me an invitation to add me to your network and reference that you're a [blog](#) or *Leader Letter* reader.

LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM SANTA

On December 17th I had some fun with this [blog](#) post. [Click here](#) to read it.

READ IT HERE OR HOT OFF MY BLOG

The items in each month's issue of *The Leader Letter* are first published in my [blog](#) (updated twice per week) the previous month. You can wait to read it all together each month in *The Leader Letter* or you can read each item as a [blog](#) post and have them sent directly to you hot off my computer by signing up at <http://www.jimclemmer.com/blog/>. Just enter your e-mail address in the upper left corner box under "Sign up for E-mail Blog Notification."

MOST POPULAR DECEMBER IMPROVEMENT POINTS

[Improvement Points](#) is a no-charge service to bring timely and inspirational quotes from my articles to subscribers three times a week. Built around our new [topic index](#), Improvement Points are crafted to help you become a better leader of yourself, your team and your organization. Each Improvement Point links directly to a full article on our web site. If you'd like to read more about the point being made in that day's Improvement Point, you simply click on the "Read the full article now" link below each IP. Many subscribers circulate especially relevant [Improvement Points](#) articles to their team, Clients, or colleagues for further discussion or action.

Here are the three most popular Improvement Points we sent out in December:

"So why is it that attempts to improve an organization rarely start in the boardroom with the management team? That's like hiring a contractor to renovate the kitchen but refusing to move anything in the cupboards and insisting that the work not disrupt any meals or family gatherings."

- from Jim Clemmer's article, "Culture Change Starts with the Management Team"

[Read the full article now!](#)

"Our values can conflict with each other. They create many paradoxes to be balanced and managed. For example, business success and family time are both high on my values hierarchy. One evening when our son Chris was about two and half years old, I was heading out the door on another trip, Chris turned in his high chair, focused his big blue eyes up at me and asked, "Are you going home now daddy?" (About six months later I called Heather from my hotel room. His younger sister Jennifer answered the phone and asked, "Are you my real daddy?" If Heather and I didn't have such a close and trusting relationship, I might begin to wonder ...)"

- from Jim Clemmer's article, "Our Values Set Our Priorities"

[Read the full article now!](#)

"Few people today want to buy from, work for, or partner with, a company that's only out for itself. For example, I can't imagine sitting down with my team, producing a set of elaborate architectural drawings for a huge, luxurious dream home, and saying, 'if you all work really hard, someday this will be mine'."

- from Jim Clemmer's article, "Leadership on Purpose"

[Read the full article now!](#)

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 e-mail at Jim.Clemmer@Clemmer.net.

Keep learning, laughing, loving, and leading – living life just for the L of it!!

Jim

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.jimclemmer.com>

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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.jimclemmer.com>

