

# Jim Clemmer's *Leader Letter*



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## JANUARY 2012, ISSUE 106

I used to love the sharp, fresh smell of ink and paper as I opened a new book and heard the creak of the spine cracking. Old, musty, and worn school readers gave off a sweet, warm odor that promised hours of entertainment and adventure.



Books don't seem to smell that way anymore. That's probably a good thing since the ink and paper was likely toxic.

Now I prefer to read books electronically for portability, instantly looking up unfamiliar words, search ability, website links, and ease of copying key research, passages, or insights into my database. But e-book pages and virtual ink doesn't smell quite the same!

A New Year is like a new book. It promises entertainment, adventure, insights, and learning. And we start the year with blank pages (or screens) waiting for us to write our own story.

The American humorist, and often curmudgeonly Samuel Clemens (more commonly known by his pen name, Mark Twain), once quipped, "*Now is the accepted time to make your regular annual good resolutions. Next week you can begin paving hell with them as usual.*" An unknown cynic piled on with, "*Many people look forward to the New Year for a new start on old habits.*" Like the dog who resolves not to chase the stick before it actually leaves your hand, changing old habits is tough!

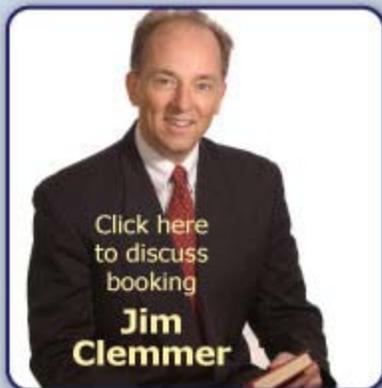
Of course, whether we author empty plans and soon-to-be-

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broken resolutions is entirely up to us. Our fate is in our own hands. That's the title of my article that TMS Learning Exchange Update just published in their *Hopes, Coming Trends...and Dreams for 2012*. Click on [Our Fate is in Our Hands](#) to read the article. It features one of my all-time favorite short stories on self-determination; *The Man Who Sold Hot Dogs*.

TMS is based in Australia. Having just come back from further service quality culture/leadership development work with Qantas Airlines in mid December, I was especially happy to respond to editor Nikki Mead's request for my contribution.

Sydney is a modern, clean, and gorgeous city nestled in a series of beautiful bays and featuring their spectacular harbor with its iconic Opera House and famous bridge. They were getting it ready for showcasing their world renowned New Year's Eve fireworks show. I spent a few extra days seeing more of the sights - and pubs - that I missed in my last trip (I'll see more in February). Our workshop was at the beautiful Fairmont Resort in the picturesque Blue Mountains just west of Sydney. Our executive group took very literally the resort's motto "change your outlook" during our three-day LEADER SHIFT retreat.

This month's issue pulls together my December blogs and is aimed at helping you and your team strengthen your culture, leadership skills, and habits. As always, the goal is to move from knowing to doing.

So take the time to get yourself focused and plan how you'll shift from me to we, as you use all the strength of the people in your organization. Develop your encouragement and support muscles and increase recognition, appreciation, and celebration. And do you need to have a few courageous conversations to write new chapters on openness, trust, and transparency?

### WEBINAR ON-DEMAND: OUR LEADERSHIP AND CULTURE DEVELOPMENT APPROACHES NOW AVAILABLE

Our November 29 leadership and culture development webinar is now available for you to review. The session outlined our implementation steps, approaches, and Client examples for leadership, organization, and culture development.

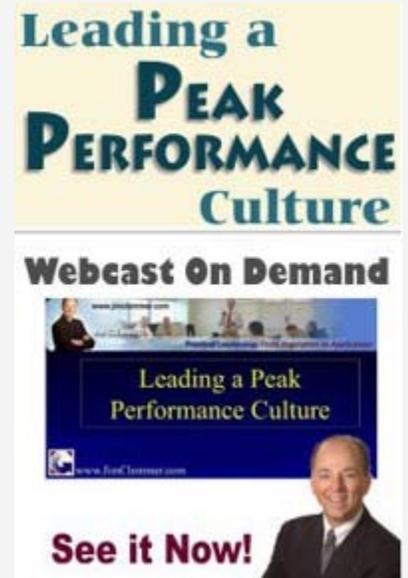
Building on my [Leading a Peak Performance Culture](#) webcast (click on the title to view it) this webinar starts with a 35 minute condensed presentation followed by 10 minutes of participant questions. It's built around the five Key Implementation Steps outlined at the end of [Leading a Peak Performance Culture](#) webcast.

I included Client examples of implementation plans, a list of typical Strategic Imperatives, and showcased some Client

work including examples of "culture on a page" featuring their core values with behavioral descriptions and 360 feedback questions for basic, expected, and exceptional performance levels.

Here's a live example of the five main pillars of a Client's implementation plan that's currently being finalized and ready to rollout:

- Organizational Culture Change – a major initiative to further clarify core values and the behaviors needed from everyone at all levels to increase service/quality levels and strengthen capacity for high growth.
- Management and Leadership Development – strengthening supervisory, management, and executive skills around an XYZ model of managerial competencies.
- Coordinating Divisional Strategic Imperatives – an integrated approach pulling together all the projects and initiatives emerging from XYZ's major strategic goals and imperatives.
- Improving Accountability, Decision Making, and Roles – increasing accountability, clarifying roles and responsibilities, performance management, governance, and lines of authority/decision making.
- Prioritizing Projects/Initiatives and Improving Major Processes – identifying and pruning/consolidating the scores of projects and committees, and reviewing communications, information, budgeting/planning, policies, etc.



In showing our approach to change and transformation, I emphasized that what's often not understood nearly well enough in "soft skills" work like leadership and culture development is the big impact and balancing of "hard management" systems and processes. For example, the well known and researched 85/15 Rule (not to be confused with the 80/20 Pareto Principle) from decades of Quality/Lean/Six Sigma work has shown that 85 - 95 percent of errors, rework, and service breakdowns are caused by the system, process, or structure. People are often the symptom carriers. So accountability and performance management of those at the end of the product or service chain is highly demotivating and unproductive. As Peter Senge stated in his classic systems thinking book, *The Fifth Discipline*, "when placed in the same system, people, however different, tend to produce similar results."

Some of the questions I responded to in the webinar included:

- How long does implementation take?
- Does the full organization need to be involved from the top executive team right down the organization?
- How many people typically attend the retreat?
- What surveys do you use to determine existing culture?

[Click here](#) to view the Practical Leadership and Culture Development Services webinar.

### WHAT'S YOUR ME/WE RATIO?

Fellow professional speaker and good friend, Donald Cooper, makes this excellent point in his December newsletter:

*"In many conversations with business owners and their teams I've been amazed and distressed at how many business owners use 'I' and 'my' when they should be using 'we' and 'our'.*

*They constantly say, 'I did this and I did that.' and refer to 'My factory, or my store and my customers' and they do this right in front of their team - the same team that they want to feel connected, engaged and committed to the business.*

*The words 'we' and 'our' fall so much more gently on the ear and the soul than the words 'I' and 'my.' They engage and honor people. They create a bond of true teamwork and cooperation. So, choose your words carefully and send the right message to your team."*

Once again, Donald is right on! You can read more of his insights at [www.DonaldCooper.com](http://www.DonaldCooper.com). I read his observation just after speaking at a management conference with an organization that followed a team building executive retreat with the senior leadership team. A key executive who leads a core part of the business epitomized the lines from the Beatles song *"coming on strong all the time, all through the day I me mine."*

This executive proclaims a need for engagement, teamwork, and ownership while wrapped up in his me-centric ego. Not surprisingly, he's seen by his peers as a key source of division and conflict on the executive team and chief silo builder between his division and others.

These are small glimpses of big ego problems. Me-centric managers aren't inspiring team builders and don't create highly engaged cultures. How's your Me/We Ratio? How do you know?



## ARE YOU USING ALL YOUR STRENGTH?

The cover article in the December issue of *Harvard Business Review* reminded me of this powerful little story:

*A scout leader was trying to lift a fallen tree from the path. His pack gathered around to watch him struggle. "Are you using all your strength?" one of the scouts asked.*



*"Yes!" was the exhausted and exasperated response.*

*"No. You are not using all your strength," the scout replied. "You haven't asked us to help you."*

In ["First, Let's Fire all the Managers,"](#) Gary Hamel reports on his study of Morning Star, a \$700 million California food producer that *"demonstrates how to create an organization that combines managerial discipline and market-centric flexibility -- without bosses, titles, or promotions."* Here are the key elements of the company's culture:

- "No one has a boss.
- Employees negotiate responsibilities with their peers.
- Everyone can spend the company's money.
- Each individual is responsible for acquiring the tools needed to do his or her work.
- There are no titles and no promotions.
- Compensation decisions are peer-based."

Visiting professor at London Business School and author of six books, Gary doesn't suggest companies fire their managers tomorrow and become like Morning Star. He does show that reducing multi-layered hierarchy and pruning policies and rules can sharply reduce overhead costs and increase organizational flexibility and response times.

Here's how to get started:

- "Ask everyone on your team to write down a personal mission. Ask each person, "What's the value you want to create for your peers? What are the problems you want to solve for your colleagues?" Challenge people to focus on benefits delivered rather than activities performed.
- Look for small ways to expand the scope of employee autonomy. Ask your colleagues, "What are the procedures that handicap you in achieving your mission?" Once you've identified the most exasperating ones, roll them back partially and

see what happens.

- Equip every team with its own P&L account. To exercise freedom wisely, employees must be able to calculate the impact of their decisions. The road to self-management is paved with information.
- You must look for ways to erase the distinctions between those who manage and those who are managed. If you're a manager, you can start by enumerating your commitments to your team."

In his article, Gary discusses the advantages and disadvantages of self-management and provides practical steps for flattening the hierarchy and managing versus managers. He concludes, "*we don't have to be starry-eyed romantics to dream of organizations where managing is no longer the right of a vaunted few but the responsibility of all.*"

I used the scout leader story to open the Teams chapter of [Pathways to Performance](#). You can read an excerpt from that chapter at "[Leadership Keys to Harnessing the Power of Teams](#)".

## **HARNESSING THE POWER OF PARTICIPATION**

There's another excellent article in December's *Harvard Business Review* on harnessing the power of highly engaged people. Professor of leadership, Douglas Ready, and PhD student, Emily Truelove, report on how companies like the beauty retailer Sephora, luxury hotel chain Four Seasons, and French food giant Danone, came through hard times stronger than ever.



In "[The Power of Collective Ambition](#)" report on their three year study of 45 companies, dozens of senior executive, manager, and CEO interviews, and workshops to construct a model summarizing why these companies defied conventional logic.

What emerged is "what we call collective ambition -- a summary of how leaders and employees think about why they exist, what they hope to accomplish, how they will collaborate to achieve their ambition, and how their brand promise aligns with their core values. These companies don't fall into the trap of pursuing a single ambition, such as profits; instead, their employees collaborate to shape a collective ambition that supersedes individual goals and takes into account the key elements required to achieve and sustain excellence."

The authors include this very insightful and useful seven scale quiz that flow from their study:

1. "Does your company have a clear and meaningful statement of its core purpose -- why it exists?"
2. Is your company's vision compelling and aspirational yet achievable, motivating employees to contribute their very best?"
3. Has your leadership team gone through the hard work of identifying targets, milestones, and metrics that ground the vision in reality?"
4. Has your company ruthlessly prioritized the choices it will make to build the capabilities required to win on a sustainable basis?"
5. Does your company's brand promise capture the experience you intend to deliver to stakeholders (customers, communities, investors, employees, and business partners)?"
6. Do your company's articulated values represent what you stand for as an enterprise and as a group of people working together?"
7. Do senior leaders' day-to-day behaviors reflect the leadership behaviors that you say are critically important to your company's success?"

This article adds yet more evidence to the mounting research on what it takes to build a peak performance culture. This is summarized on my [Leading a Peak Performance Culture](#) webcast and the follow up implementation webinar on [The CLEMMER Group Practical Leadership and Culture Development Services](#).

Katie Taylor, CEO of Four Seasons, summarizes how the company has thrived through one of the worst business slumps in decades; "we have 34,000 employees who get up every morning thinking about how to serve our guests even better than the day before. So while all of this trouble is swirling around us, our brand promise of providing the most exceptional guest experience wherever and whenever you visit us is instilled in the hearts and minds of our dedicated employees. They are the ones who fulfill that promise day in and day out."

### **GIVING THE GIFT OF ENCOURAGEMENT AND SUPPORT**

'Tis the season of gifts and giving. The warmth and good cheer of the Holiday Season is often the reminder we need of how giving and helping others can really help us too. George Burton Adams, an early 20th century American educator and historian once observed, *"Note how good you feel after you have encouraged someone else. No other argument is necessary to suggest that we never miss the opportunity to give encouragement."*



When our daughter Vanessa was 20 years old, I came home one day to find her beaming and proudly displaying a new necklace she was just given as a thank-you gift. It seems I'd just missed her visitor, Jeremy, who had dropped by to express his appreciation for Vanessa's "tough friendship" when the two of them were in a pre-college preparatory course a year earlier. Jeremy was struggling with drug and alcohol problems. Throughout the school year, Vanessa altered between scolding him and reinforcing just what potential she believed he had. She told him about Alcoholics Anonymous and encouraged him to attend. When he told her he was planning to move to Western Canada to get away from the negative influence of his family and friends, she strongly encouraged him to follow his heart.

Now he was back in Kitchener-Waterloo visiting family and friends. He went out of his way to thank Vanessa for setting him on the path to recovery and life renewal. He had been steadily attending AA meetings and was pulling his life together. Jeremy was so inspired by the changes in his life that he planned to become an addictions counselor in Vancouver. This experience gave Vanessa and me a chance to talk about and reflect on the power of encouraging, supporting, and helping others. Leaders build others up and look for ways to challenge or coach them out of the swamp and onto their leadership stairway.

As I wrote Vanessa's story for [Growing @ the Speed of Change](#) I came across this African fable on the power of giving which I also included in the book:

*An African girl presented a Christmas gift to her teacher. When the teacher unwrapped the gift, she found a beautiful sea shell. Asked where the child could have found it, she told her teacher those unique shells come only from a special far-away beach. The teacher was very touched and remarked, "You shouldn't have gone so far for a gift for me." The girl looked at her, smiled and replied, "The long walk is part of the gift."*

### **DO YOU NEED A FEW COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS?**

May you enjoy a Moose-free Holiday Season! Moose-on-the-table is a concept I've written about extensively such as in my "edutaining" fictional book by that title. Around the world I've facilitated management teams having courageous conversations about elephants in the room, and kangaroos or camels on the table.



The original concept comes from families with significant issues like abuse or alcoholism but avoid talking about them. So that moose stands on the dining room table eating off one end and dropping moose pies on the other end. Everyone ignores the hairy beast and pretends it's not there.

Courageous conversations were a core theme of [\*Moose on the Table: A Novel Approach to Communications @ Work\*](#). It was also woven through [\*Growing @ the Speed of Change: Your Inspir-actional How-To Guide For Leading Yourself and Others through Constant Change\*](#). Here's an excerpt from [\*Growing @ the Speed of Change\*](#) to ponder as you head into the Holiday Season.

### Courageous Personal Conversations

*"The easiest kind of relationship for me is with ten thousand people. The hardest is with one."*

- Joan Baez (1941 – ), Mexican-American folk singer and songwriter

I was speaking to a group going through huge organizational changes as their industry experienced dramatic restructuring. We broke the auditorium into three sections with small discussion groups in each identifying what we're feeling, saying, and doing when dealing with these changes in leading, following, or wallowing mode. During the recap of each group's findings, we agreed that often we need to dip down into Wallowing territory to vent briefly or let go of painful emotions during times of big changes in our personal or professional lives. I added that we may take therapeutic visits to Pity City, but it's a deadly place to live. A woman in the front row blurted out, "My husband is the mayor!"

I hope she was talking with him about that and constructively challenging or reframing his thinking. Less effective relationships -- many of which don't last -- are characterized by poor quality and quantity of communications. Often that's because of low courage, skill, or under-appreciating just how critical those courageous conversations really are.

Psychologist and author of *The 100 Simple Secrets of Relationships*, David Niven, reports "Couples who never argue are 35 percent more likely to divorce. On the surface, that seems like a strange finding, since we associate arguments with bad outcomes, but an inability to share frustration is a dangerous thing. If you don't argue, [frustrations] build up within you until they get bigger and bigger." Of course, the quality of those arguments -- staying on message about the problems, issue or specific behavior and not making personal attacks or put-downs -- is also critical.

## WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR RECOGNITION, APPRECIATION, AND CELEBRATION?

After another epic global feat, Santa must now be taking the pause that refreshes! The Holiday Season should be that critical pause for all of us.



Hopefully, your Holidays were a time of family, friends, and celebrations. And hopefully you strengthened your gratitude skills by looking back at all you've accomplished and have to be thankful for during 2011.

Now's a great time to make plans for strengthening recognition, appreciation, and celebration skills in your teams and organizations. "Weak Leaders Use Money as a Motivator" can help you get started on your 2012 recognition planning. [YourWorkplace magazine](#), a very high quality publication that you should check out - has just published this article at [Weak Leaders Use Money as a Motivator](#).

Marcus Erb has also written a very useful article to further help you. See [Seven Ways to Boost Employee Morale](#) for good examples and practical tips.

I've written quite a lot on this incredibly powerful - and vastly underutilized - workplace energy source. Peruse a large selection of Recognition, Appreciation, and Celebration [articles](#) and [blog posts](#) as you take the pause that refreshes!

## THOUGHTS THAT MAKE YOU GO HMMM ON... RECOGNITION, APPRECIATION, AND CELEBRATION

"The most neglected form of compensation is the six-letter word thanks."

- Robert Townsend,  
former Amex and Avis  
executive and author of  
*Up the Organization*



"What we've found is that exceptional leaders lead with gratitude, they pause to feel and express it first, because they have discovered that this is an essential way to improve organizational life, and they know that the feeling of appreciation will come back to them twofold."

- Robert K. Cooper and Aymen Sawaf, *Executive EQ: Emotional Intelligence in Leadership and Organizations*

"Celebration is given high priority in both organizations (Wal-Mart and Southwest Airlines). Although this may often engage employees in what some would regard as 'hokey' behavior, it is memorable to participants and communicates the importance of people. Celebration, to the extent that it contributes to the quality of work life, may help explain why both of these companies achieve extraordinary productivity when compared with their peers."

- James Heskett, *The Culture Cycle: How to Shape the Unseen Force that Transforms Performance*

"Brains, like hearts, go where they are appreciated."

- Robert McNamara, former American business executive and Secretary of Defence

"... one study found that project teams with encouraging managers performed 31 percent better than teams whose managers were less positive and less open with praise. In fact, when recognition is specific and deliberately delivered, it is even more motivating than money."

- Shawn Achor, *The Happiness Advantage: The Seven Principles of Positive Psychology That Fuel Success and Performance at Work*

"Personalized feedback and recognition aren't just 'frills' that make workers feel good. Rather, they are crucial predictors of positive workplace outcomes such as employee retention and productivity."

- Sam Crabtree "What Your Employees Need to Know", *Gallup Management Journal*

"Studies show that organizational leaders who share positive emotions have workgroups with, a more positive mood, enhanced job satisfaction, greater engagement, and improved performance... Shine a Light on What Is Right. Try focusing on what employees or peers do right rather than where they need improvement, and discover the power of reinforcing good behaviours... Reverse the Golden Rule. Instead of "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," you should "Do unto others as they would have you do unto them." Individualization is key when filling others' buckets."

- Tom Rath and Donald O. Clifton, *How Full Is Your Bucket? Positive Strategies for Work and Life*

"Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it."

- William Arthur Ward, former American author and professional speaker

### TWEET READING: RECOMMENDED ONLINE RESOURCES

This section summarizes last month's LinkedIn Updates and Twitter Tweets sent 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.



My original tweet commenting on the article precedes each title and descriptor from the original source:

Insights on a few key concepts relevant to these turbulent times from Collins and Hansen's nine year research study.

['Great by Choice': Jim Collins and Morten T. Hansen on Excelling in Uncertain Times, Part Two.](http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/)  
<http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/>

*"...the critical importance of "zooming out" and "zooming in" to get your bearings in any situation; and when and how to introduce change in an organization for 10X success."*

Another writer compared this rude behavior with smoking back in the 70s. We need to call people on their anti-social techno habits.

["How To Lose Friends and Alienate Coworkers With Bad Mobile Behavior"](#) - Jenna Goudreau  
<http://www.forbes.com>

*"Nearly 80% of HR managers believe mobile devices are being abused at work. Bad mobile behavior is all around us and in many circumstances can cost you friends and coworkers."*

Work-life balance is a major issue in organizations that enervate people with unsatisfying drudgery rather than energize them with purposeful work.

["Why work and life shouldn't be separate"](#) - Russell Eisenstat  
<http://management.fortune.cnn.com>

*"The real issue is not about forcing people to compartmentalize their lives at work, at home, and in their communities but rather how to keep people energized and engaged in all aspects of their lives."*

Courageous conversations, the courage of our convictions, or the courage to follow our inner voice is a foundational leadership virtue.

["Courage in the C-Suite"](#) - Rosabeth Moss Kanter  
<http://hbr.org>

*"Courage makes change possible. Intellectual courage is necessary to challenge conventional wisdom and imagine new possibilities. Leaders must refuse to accept limits or stop at industry boundaries."*

## **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 one of my books. 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@Clemmer.net](mailto:Jim.Clemmer@Clemmer.net) or connect with me on [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), [FaceBook](#), or my [blog](#)!

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

Jim



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