

# THE LEADER LETTER

Leading with *STRENGTH*

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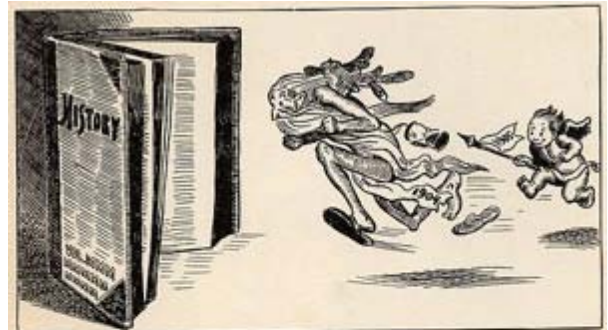
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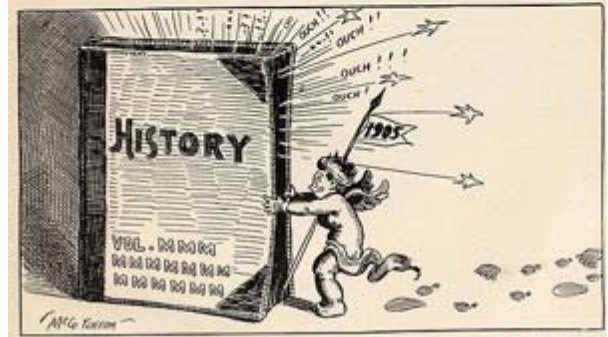
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## JANUARY 2014, ISSUE 130

Nearly 100 years ago, this John T. McCutcheon cartoon (known in his day as the "Dean of American Cartoonists") showed the young New Year of 1905 chasing the old man of 1904 into the history books. The cycle of constant change takes one more turn.



A major theme underlying my books, workshops, our training and consulting services, and over a decade of writing [The Leader Letter](#) is that personal and leadership



growth is critical to dealing with change. A New Year is a predictable time of change and renewal. But changes in our personal and organizational lives often hit us with unpredictable force.

Step one is accepting the change, rather than wallowing and complaining. Change simply is what it is. Step two is flexing ourselves for the change to fuel our personal, team, or organizational growth. Life is constant, endless, and unpredictable change. Change is inevitable. Growth or misery is optional.

In the same era as this cartoon, James Allen, a 19th century British writer of inspirational self-help books and poetry, wrote *As a Man Thinketh*. In it he said, "Man's mind may be likened to a garden, which

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*may be intelligently cultivated or allowed to run wild; but whether cultivated or neglected, it must, and will, bring forth. If no useful seeds are put into it, then an abundance of useless weed-seeds will fall therein, and will continue to produce their kind."*

2014 stretches out ahead of us like a fertile garden. If we plant seeds of personal, team, and organization development, healthy leadership will grow in the year ahead.

This issue publishes my December [blog](#) posts. This month features pieces on coaching, strengths-based leadership development, focusing our leadership with emotional agility, the cascading effect of good and bad leaders, boosting employee engagement, assessing our effectiveness at giving and getting feedback, leadership lessons from Santa, looking back to focus ahead, and New Year's thoughts.

Make this be your year to get up and grow!

### YOU'RE INVITED TO JOIN OUR RARE COACHING SYMPOSIUM

Coaching skills development is a major concern for many organizations. And for good reason. Leaders with extraordinary coaching skills create 8 times higher employee engagement, 2.5 times higher job satisfaction, 3 times more willingness to "go the extra mile," half as many employees thinking about quitting, and dramatically higher levels of customer service and satisfaction.



A few years before The CLEMMER Group became strategic partners with Zenger Folkman I reviewed Jack Zenger and Kathleen Stinnett's outstanding book [The Extraordinary Coach: How the Best Leaders Help Others Grow](#). In over 30 years of researching, writing about, and delivering coaching skills training I've read and cited from a very tall stack of books, reports, research, white papers, and other material on coaching. I rated this book as by far the best I've ever read on this vital topic.

As Zenger Folkman partners we've now delivered many *Extraordinary Coach* workshops. I've never before seen participants shift their thinking, develop new skills, and walk away with as many "ahas" and how-to's on coaching as with this powerful approach.

Now you have a very rare chance to get coached on coaching skills development by Jack and Kathleen. On March 12 – 13, 2014 in Orlando, Florida you can experience the full two-day workshop as well as a

dinner presentation on "Creating a Coaching Culture." During these inspiring and skill-packed two-days you'll:

- Turbo-charge your coaching skills with practical, applied approaches
- Learn the "FUEL coaching communication model" to guide powerful coaching conversations
- Develop deeper skills in giving constructive feedback
- Receive a research-based coaching feedback assessment to further build your coaching strengths
- Use Zenger Folkman's unique cross-training approach to build your customized personal development plan
- Discover the key steps to building a coaching culture

You can get lots more information at [Zenger Folkman Coaching Symposium](#). Save \$100 by registering before January 31st by using this discount code: CS-EARLYBIRD. If you're living in the frozen north, March in Florida is an extra bonus! While in Orlando you might even want to go say Hi to Mickey Mouse! We hope to see you there!

## **JOIN OUR STRENGTHS-BASED LEADERSHIP DISCUSSION GROUP**

If you're a LinkedIn member, please join our [Strengths-Based Leadership Development](#) group. If you're not already connected to me, please click on [http://ca.linkedin.com /in/jimclemmer/](http://ca.linkedin.com/in/jimclemmer/) and send me an invitation to connect.



As a reader of *The Leader Letter* you should find our recent discussion ([How do you help leaders let go of focusing on their weaknesses?](#)) useful. Here are some of the points we've been discussing:

- The traditional deficit model in education and business makes it difficult for people to flourish.
- Using strengths to minimize and overshadow weaknesses.
- Management By Exception -- a leader manages the exceptions and only intervenes when there's a problem -- is deeply ingrained in organizations.
- Can a weakness also be a strength by reframing the weakness/strength model to characteristics, intentions, and goals?
- Leaders can let go of focusing on weaknesses through being confidently vulnerable.
- The "doom loop" of less effective leaders comes from insecurity and not being OK with exposing weaknesses.

Last month I facilitated a session with 20 leaders going through [The Extraordinary Leader](#) process. Once again I saw many leaders struggle with how to address weaknesses. If a weakness is fatal to a leader's effectiveness, he or she needs to fix that.

But most often weaknesses aren't fatal flaws and we need to let them go. Building a strength from good to great draws other strengths with it. Research clearly shows that elevating just 3 – 5 strengths to profound strengths boosts overall leadership so high weaknesses become irrelevant and are overlooked.

We'd love to have you join our [Strengths-Based Leadership Development](#) group and our discussion if you feel so inclined.

## **LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM SANTA FOR THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS**

I posted this on December 24 -- just before the big night when kids get their yearly performance review. Where will the big guy watching from the North Pole mark them on the naughty-nice scale? Will it be enough to get them into the next gift bracket?



When we published [Growing @ the Speed of Change: Your Inspirational How-To Guide For Leading Yourself and Others through Constant Change](#) a few years ago I posted this blog based on some of the approaches in the book:

### **We Create Our Own Reality**

Life is an optical illusion. Happiness is a choice. 90 percent of what we worry about never happens. How much more incredible is flying reindeer than wearing crap glasses, looking for all that's wrong, and worrying ourselves sick?

### **Being Nice Has Its Rewards**

Optimism, hope, and building on strengths means we enjoy life much more than the poor Grinch who's making himself and everyone else miserable. We tend to get back what we give.

### **Leadership Can Come From Unlikely Places**

Leadership is action, not a position. Rudolph saved the day because Santa was flexible and open to leadership emerging from unconventional places during the foggy crisis. He built a highly engaged team with a strong sense of commitment to each other and their mission.

## Setting Priorities and Managing Processes

You think you're overwhelmed! How about the logistics of delivering toys to all the world's kids in 24 hours? The Big Guy and his team spent a year planning and preparing for the big day.

## Stay Nourished and Get Help along the Way

Santa frequently stops for milk and cookies for himself and carrots for the reindeer. Although he might be better off with fewer cookies and more carrots, he does take the pause that refreshes and makes sure his team is well fed too.

Let's learn from Santa's elf-help manual and take some time to reflect on what's really important before we rush headlong into the New Year.

## **BECOMING A MORE FOCUSED LEADER WITH EMOTIONAL AGILITY**

Where did 2013 go?! Were the days of the past year a tornado of multi-tasking juggling endless e-mails, phone calls, hurried hallway conversations, and racing between meetings? Did you spend countless hours putting out fires and responding to one problem after another?



A major leadership -- and life -- skill in today's crazy-busy times is focus. December's *Harvard Business Review* article by Emotional Intelligence guru, Daniel Goleman, "The Focused Leader," is timely. Goleman starts by declaring, "The primary task of leadership is to direct attention." Never has that been more vital than today.

*"Focused leaders can command the full range of their own attention: They are in touch with their inner feelings, they can control their impulses, they are aware of how others see them, and they can weed out distractions and also allow their minds to roam widely, free of preconceptions."*

A November *Harvard Business Review* article on "Emotional Agility" provides further insights and how-to steps. Psychologist Susan David and mindfulness researcher and coach, Christina Congleton, advise that it starts with clarifying your personal values. Drawing on research from Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), David and Congleton provide four steps to emotional agility -- and focus:

1. **"Recognize your patterns.** You have to realize that you're stuck before you can initiate change.
2. **Label your thoughts and emotions.** Labeling allows you to see them as transient sources of data that may or may not prove helpful.

3. **Accept them.** Respond to your ideas and emotions with an open attitude, paying attention and letting yourself experience them. They may be signaling that something important is at stake.
4. **Act on your values.** Is your response going to serve your organization in the long term and take you toward being the leader you most want to be?"

It's way too easy to get sucked into the busyness vortex. Breaking free calls for awareness, focus, and reshaping our habits.

## SEASON'S READINGS: LOOKING BACK TO FOCUS AHEAD

I've found the Holidays and beginning of the New Year a great time for looking back over the past twelve months and focusing on what lies ahead.



One of the biggest challenges of our time is the tornado of multi-tasking crazy-busy bustle that can spin us around in ever faster circles. If we're not careful we end up just getting through ever more hectic days and not really living and leading.

This is a great time to assess whether we're spending way too much time sweating the small stuff and missing the big picture. Unless we turn down the volume we can't hear our inner voice.

In *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment* Martin Seligman writes, "Weigh up your life once a year. If you find you are getting short weight, change your life. You will usually find that the solution lies in your own hands." Leadership and organization systems consultant and author, Meg Wheatley, has found that reflection "is for me a lifesaver; it is not just a nice thing to do if you have the time. It is the only way you can survive ... without reflection, we go blindly on our way, creating more unintended consequences, and failing to achieve anything useful."

Here are a few blogs to help you pause, reflect, and focus:

- ["The Learning Paradox: Slowing Down to Go Faster"](#)
- ["The Acceleration Trap: Frantic Busyness and Priority Overload is Overwhelming Way Too Many Teams and Organizations"](#)
- ["Reader Reflections on Frantic Busyness, Priority Overload, and The Acceleration Trap"](#)
- ["Reclaim Your Time, Reclaim Your Life"](#)
- ["Leaders Focus on Reflection and Renewal"](#)
- ["A Fable and Thoughts on Reflection and Renewal"](#)
- ["Leadership Reflections from Warren Bennis"](#)

May 2014 be your best year yet!

## THE CASCADING EFFECT OF GOOD AND BAD LEADERS

Recently Zenger Folkman correlated assessment data from three organizational levels to look at the cascading impact of senior leader effectiveness on their direct reports and in turn on the next level below them.



The study found that managers who worked for the worst executives had awful engagement levels in the 24th percentile. However, managers working for the best executives had soaring engagement levels at the 82nd percentile. If the level reporting to a manager was led by a horrible executive their engagement was in the 39th percentile. This compares with those levels reporting to a manager led by an outstanding executive showing engagement levels at the 61st percentile.

This is quite a bit different than their managers' engagement with either very poor or very good executives heading up their group. If executives had no effect on their managers' leadership effectiveness the average manager's score would be at the 50th percentile given the large sample of 6,094 people.

From this and other analysis in this study Jack Zenger and Joe Folkman conclude:

- *It's not easy to be a buffer: a bad boss is a drag on a leader's effectiveness.*
- *It is possible to work for one of the worst leaders and yet be rated as one of the best yourself.*
- *Great leaders do more good than poor leaders do harm.*
- *To those who say their destiny is in their own hands, we'd say they could be right -- the cycle of poor leadership can be broken.*
- *Good leaders are expending a lot of energy they could be using more productively when they have to manage and buffer a bad boss.*
- *So often in our practice senior leaders ask us to "fix" the leaders below them. The reality is our job would be much easier if the leaders at the top were as highly committed to fixing themselves first.*
- *Leaders cast a strong shadow on those who report to them.*

Jack and Joe published their findings in their columns in *Harvard Business Review* blog [Will Your Bad Boss Make You a Bad Boss, Too?](#) Jack expanded on this research in his *Forbes* column, [The Results Are In: Bad Leadership is Contagious.](#)

## LEADERSHIP AND CULTURE DEVELOPMENT TO BOOST EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

After hearing me deliver a keynote presentation at a conference last summer, "Amir," a regional director for a large technical services firm, called for help. The company's core service is delivered by highly paid technicians with deep expertise and qualifications. Replacing a technician is very difficult and costly.



Amir called me because they had a growing turnover problem. Key technicians were leaving and moving to competitors. The company invested heavily in technical training but had done little leadership development. Engagement surveys over the past few years showed a gradual downward trend.

We discussed the difference between a "bolt-on" employee engagement and leadership training program and a "built-in" process of leadership and culture development. Amir agreed we should start by bringing his regional management team together to "[Harness the Power of an Offsite Retreat](#)".

The two-day retreat resulted in strong agreement and sharp clarity about where the management team wanted to strengthen their culture, how to do it, and four Strategic Imperatives to making it happen. Implementation and follow through is now underway.

Having just completed this retreat, I was fascinated to read a recent Client study by Zenger Folkman identifying seven factors that led to a significant increase in employee satisfaction. In "[Seven Ways to Increase Employee Satisfaction Without Giving a Raise](#)", Joe Folkman outlines the key factors:

1. Consistent Values
2. Long Term Focus
3. Local Leadership
4. Continuous Communication
5. Collaboration
6. Opportunities for Development
7. Speed and Agility

These success factors are woven deeply into the Strategic Imperative Teams and implementation plan emerging from the retreat with Amir's regional management team.

Like deteriorating health, employee disengagement is a gradual process. Boosting employee engagement is a step by step leadership and culture development effort that -- when done effectively -- elevates organizational health and performance from good to great.



## THOUGHTS THAT MAKE YOU GO HMMM ON... A NEW YEAR

*"We spend January 1st walking through our lives, room by room, drawing up a list of work to be done, cracks to be patched. Maybe this year, to balance the list, we ought to walk through the rooms of our lives ... not looking for flaws, but for potential."*



- Ellen Goodman, American journalist and Pulitzer Prize-winning syndicated columnist

*"For last year's words belong to last year's language  
And next year's words await another voice."*

- T.S. Eliot, British poet, playwright, essayist and Nobel Laureate in Literature

*"We will open the book. Its pages are blank. We are going to put words on them ourselves. The book is called Opportunity and its first chapter is New Year's Day."*

- Edith Lovejoy Pierce, 20th century American poet

*"A New Year's resolution is something that goes in one year and out the other."*

- Author unknown

*"The reason so many people fail to keep their New Year's resolutions is that they took the wrong approach ... according to British psychologist Richard Wiseman of the University of Hertfordshire ... people who failed tended to dwell on the 'bad things' that would happen if they did not achieve their goal ... successful study participants, on the other hand, broke their goals into small steps, rewarding themselves when each stage was passed. They told friends about what they were trying to achieve, reminded themselves of the benefits of obtaining their goal, and charted their progress."*

- Michael Kesterton, Social Studies, *The Globe & Mail*

*"The Old Year has gone. Let the dead past bury its own dead. The New Year has taken possession of the clock of time. All hail the duties and possibilities of the coming twelve months!"*

- Edward Payson Powell, 19th Century American author

"People are so worried about what they eat between Christmas and the New Year, but they really should be worried about what they eat between the New Year and Christmas."

- Author unknown

## ASSESS YOUR EFFECTIVENESS AT GETTING AND GIVING FEEDBACK

Albert Einstein's oft quoted definition of insanity is, "doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." If we keep doing what we've been doing, we'll keep getting what we've been getting. To move our leadership effectiveness to a new level, we need to blaze new paths.



Feedback is critical to increased leadership effectiveness. Leaders "on the grow" use feedback to guide their development. And highly effective leaders provide feedback to others to coach and guide their growth.

As you set out on the adventure of blazing your pathways into 2014 consider this recent research on the power of feedback:

- Leaders ranked in the bottom 10% in asking for feedback were rated at the 15th percentile in overall leadership effectiveness.
- Leaders ranked in the top 10% in asking for feedback were rated in the 86th percentile in overall leadership effectiveness.
- Leaders ranked in the bottom 10% in their ability to give honest feedback to direct reports showed engagement scores in the 25th percentile.
- Leaders rated as better at giving feedback than 90% of their peers had direct reports ranked at the 77th percentile in engagement.

How good are you at getting and giving feedback? Zenger Folkman just developed a self-assessment tool to help you measure this vital leadership behavior and skill. Go to [Overcoming Feedback Phobia: Take the First Step](#) for more on this vital topic from Jack Zenger and Joe Folkman's latest *Harvard Business Review* blog and a link to the self-assessment.

Don't be drawn down the well-travelled and broad path toward insanity. Take the path less travelled, be an Einstein, and use feedback to spring forward in 2014!

## TWEET READING: RECOMMENDED ONLINE RESOURCES

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.



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

Read -- and join in -- our discussion with a variety of views, including Jack Zenger, on how tough it is to let go of focusing on weaknesses.

["How do you help leaders let go of focusing on their weaknesses?"](#) -- Jim Clemmer  
[www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com)

*"Addressing misconceptions of 'acknowledging your weaknesses and taking steps to improve them' and how 'focusing on positive energy can remove the ability to move ahead.'"*

Practical suggestions for taking the best from painful or difficult feedback and using it for growth and development.

["How To Turn Negative Feedback Into Something Positive"](#)  
[www.forbes.com](http://www.forbes.com)

*"Negative feedback at work is painful. It might make you angry or frightened--but if you're able to turn it into a positive thing, the negative feedback can actually be your key to success."*

Team leaders with forceful personalities coupled with the power of their position often don't realize how they reduce team effectiveness.

["Pulpit Bullies: Why Dominating Leaders Kill Teams"](#) -- Michael Blanding, HBS Working Knowledge  
<http://hbswk.hbs.edu>

*"Power interrupts, and absolute power interrupts absolutely. Francesca Gino and colleagues discover that a high-powered boss can lead a team into poor performance."*

An eclectic collection of HBR statistics and studies showing some trends we'd expect and others that are quite surprising.

["10 Charts from 2013 That Changed the Way We Think"](#)

-- Gretchen Gavett

<http://blogs.hbr.org>

*"The visual stories that made us look twice."*

Perks, privileges, and other actions separating management ranks contradict rhetoric about engagement, teamwork, and we're in this together.

["The High Price of Aloof Leadership"](#) -- Jack Zenger,

*Forbes*

<http://www.forbes.com>

*"Leaders with warm, close relationships with their subordinates are consistently seen in a much more positive light by all of their colleagues. They produce high customer satisfaction, superior employee commitment and engagement..."*

## 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](#)!

May the Force (of strengths) be with you!

Jim





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