



Issue 178 - January 2018

A few years ago, I ran into an old colleague I hadn't seen for a while. Our short conversation confirmed just why I hadn't seen him in a while. I greeted him with, "Hey Phil. How's it going?" His response was, "Oh, you know; same crap, different day." He then proceeded to proudly pile up the most recent crap in his life and invited me to wallow in it with him.



Our world does have lots of crap. There's plenty of injustice, inequality, and unfairness. The crap that hits the fan in life is often not evenly distributed. But we can decide whether to stand in it or not. We decide if we want today to be crappy or happy. If we walk around with our "crap glasses" on, we'll see lots of it. The more crap we look for, the more crap we see. The more crap we see, the more we look for. Author, speaker, and psychologist, Peter Jensen calls this "opticalrectumitis," which he loosely translates as "having a shi...(crappy) outlook on life."

The American Heritage Dictionary provides these definitions of the glasses we can choose to wear:

Pessimism

1. A tendency to stress the negative or unfavorable or to take the gloomiest possible view.
2. The doctrine or belief that this is the worst of all possible worlds and that all things ultimately tend toward evil.
3. The doctrine or belief that the evil in the world outweighs the good.

Optimism

1. A tendency to expect the best possible outcome or dwell on the most hopeful aspects of a situation.
2. The doctrine that this world is the best of all possible worlds.
3. The belief that the universe is improving and that good will ultimately triumph over evil.

Scientist, journalist, and author, Matt Ridley's book, *The Rational Optimist: How Prosperity Evolves* lays out a powerful argument in nearly 500 pages of meticulous research for how much better our world has become -- and how the good is speeding up. He writes, "I am a rational optimist: rational, because I have arrived at optimism not through temperament or instinct, but by looking at the evidence... the world is as good a place to live as it has ever been for the average human being."

19th Century historian and politician, Thomas Babington Macauley, once asked "On what principle is it, that when we see nothing but improvement behind us, we are to expect nothing but deterioration before us?" We're surrounded by prophets of doom spreading the pessimism plague. It's a deadly disease that's now well proven to reduce our happiness and well-being.

Ridley's research led him to conclude, "For 200 years pessimists have had all the headlines, even though optimists have far more often been right. Archpessimists are feted, showered with honors and rarely challenged, let alone confronted with their past mistakes... if you say catastrophe is imminent, you may expect a McArthur genius award or even the Nobel Peace Prize."

Charities don't raise money and journalists don't get their stories on the front page by focusing on what's going well. Good news is no news. Which is why "the media go to great lengths to search even the most cheerful of statistics for glimmers of doom."

To help you get real and kick off your new year on notes of optimism and positivity, face the positive facts in this issue countering the endless stream of negative "news." You'll also find year end reflections to begin your new year. This is a good beginning point for looking at the strategic use of time for you and your leadership team. And you may find a few seasonal lessons from Scrooge with help in reflecting and planning how to make the best use of the year ahead.

Happy New Year!

Don't Get Dragged Down by all the Negative News: Life's Better Than Ever

Our world has never been in better shape or more prosperous. But you'd never know it by reading the news.

"A lot of people look at the news these days and think that the world is falling apart," Bill Gates says: "I have a different view. I think the world has never been better -- more peaceful, prosperous, safe, or just. And I'm on a mission to prove it." He goes on to explain, "Headlines, in a way, are what mislead you, because bad news is a headline, and gradual improvement is not." Now there's fake news.



Our New Year's blog on how the world is getting radically better has become our most inspiring and favorite to research and produce. This tradition started four years ago with "**A Dose of Reality: Our World is Dramatically Better**". The following year we reported "**Despite Dire Headlines the World is Getting Much, Much Better**". Last year we added to our long and growing list of positive facts with "**Beyond the Doom and Gloom: Over 65 Ways Our World Keeps Getting Better**".

Here's just some of the latest evidence to add to what's now almost 100 facts showing that our world is relentlessly and exponentially getting better and better and better:

- **American carbon monoxide emissions** from transport are down 75 per cent in twenty-five years.
- Over the last 200 years, **the world's GDP has skyrocketed 100-fold**.
- In 2016, **solar power grew faster than any other fuel source** for the first time ever.
- In 2017, **wind power became cheaper than nuclear in the UK**, with the cost of subsidies slashed in half since 2015.
- America has **more trees now** than it did in 1920. The area consumed by wildfire each year has fallen by 90% as well, and populations of many wildlife species have dramatically increased as a result.
- **Artificial meat production** has huge, positive implications for food security and animal welfare.
- Harvard scientists have genetically altered a bacteria that turns **CO2 emissions into biofuel**.

- **Plastic-eating caterpillars** could help cut pollution.
- In 2016, there were **fewer than 40 new cases of polio** worldwide.
- There are now about **120 democracies among the world's 193 countries**, up from just 40 in 1972.
- Over the past 25 years, **an average of 137,000 people were lifted out of extreme poverty** each day.
- Today, **the death rate from HIV is about 0.14 people per 1,000** in the population, down from a high of 0.30 in the early 2000s.
- The world has gone from eating 83 pounds of fruit a year in 1961 to **172 pounds in 2013**, more than a 100% increase.
- **Food scarcities are disappearing.** In 1961, the average person consumed 2,200 calories a day. By 2013, the number had risen to 2,900 a day.
- **Since 1800**, the population of the world has multiplied six times, yet average life expectancy has more than doubled and real income has risen more than nine times.
- Today, of **Americans officially designated as 'poor'**, 99 per cent have electricity, running water, flush toilets, and a refrigerator; 95 per cent have a television, 88 per cent a telephone, 71 per cent a car and 70 per cent air conditioning. Cornelius Vanderbilt had none of these.
- **Deaths from stroke** fell by 70 per cent between 1950 and 2000 in America and Europe.
- An hour of work today earns you **300 days' worth of reading light**; an hour of work in 1800 earned you ten minutes of reading light.
- **A three-minute phone call** from New York to Los Angeles cost ninety hours of work at the average wage in 1910; today it costs less than two minutes.
- **The price of computing power fell so fast** in the last quarter of the twentieth century that the capacity of a tiny pocket calculator in 2000 would have cost you a lifetime's wages in 1975.
- **In 1900, the average American spent \$76** of every \$100 on food, clothing and shelter. Today he spends \$37.
- **The warfare death rate of 0.5 per cent** of the population per year that was typical of many hunter-gatherer societies would equate to two billion people dying during the twentieth century (instead of 100 million).
- Millennials are putting their money in **sustainable investments** at a rate that's 2x higher than average.

How's your glass? Is it half full or half empty? We can focus on what we have and enjoy it. Or we can focus on what we don't have and be miserable.

Resolve to face the facts this year. Life is very good and rapidly getting even better.

Click for More Positive Facts:

- **"16 Things That Prove The World Is Getting Better, Not Worse"**
- **"The world is getting better -- here is the proof** – World Economic Forum
- **"Why the World Is (Still) Better Than You Think -- New Evidence For Abundance"**
- **"Is the World Really Better Than Ever?"**
– *The Guardian*
- **"The Best Stats You've Ever Seen"** – statistician Hans Rosling's inspiring and entertaining TED talk
- **"These charts show the world is better than ever -- even if things seem apocalyptic"** – *Business Insider*
- **"Reasons to be cheerful: a full switch to low-carbon energy is in sight"** – *The Guardian*
- **"The Rational Optimist: How Prosperity Evolves"**, Matty Ridley
- **"Abundance: The Future is Better Than You Think"**, Peter H. Diamandis and Steven Kotler
- **"Business as an Agent of World Benefit"**, David Cooperrider and Christopher Johnston, Scoop.it!
- *Find even more links at the bottom of each of the three past blogs mentioned in the third paragraph above*

Year End Reflections: Looking Back to Better Move Ahead

The comedian Phyllis Diller once joked, "What I don't like about office Christmas parties is looking for a job the next day." Hopefully, you're not in that situation during the Holidays!

This is a great time of year to step back to see if we're caught in the speed trap. As the pace of life keeps accelerating, it's way too easy to race faster without zooming out on Google Maps to see where our little blinking blue dot is headed. Are we on the right road?



The Irish poet, William Butler Yeats, wrote, "We can make our minds so like still water that beings gather about us, that they may see their own images, and so live for a moment with a clearer, perhaps even with a fiercer life because of our quiet." Numerous studies show that the most effective leaders and organizations pause periodically to look at the direction they're heading. Like an artist painting on a canvas, we need to stand back to get perspective. Are the individual brush strokes coming together to paint the picture we've been envisioning?

There are many Holiday movies to remind us of life's bigger picture and purpose. In "**Have a Purposeful Holiday for a Wonderful Life**", I wrote that one of my favorite holiday movies (and one of the highest rated at Internet Movie Database with a rare 8.6/10 by over 300,000 people) is "It's a Wonderful Life" (if you're not familiar with the movie, [click here](#) to watch a trailer). The main storyline of the movie is George Bailey's agonizing journey toward realizing he's living his life purpose. "**Have a Purposeful Holiday for a Wonderful Life**" includes links to resources on finding our personal purpose.

Purpose and meaning are vital elements to creating our own wonderful life. There's a major shift in business schools, organizations, and society toward balancing purpose and profit. "**Profit is a Means Not an End**", discusses this and the "good company" research showing how business success has shifted in our "worthiness era."

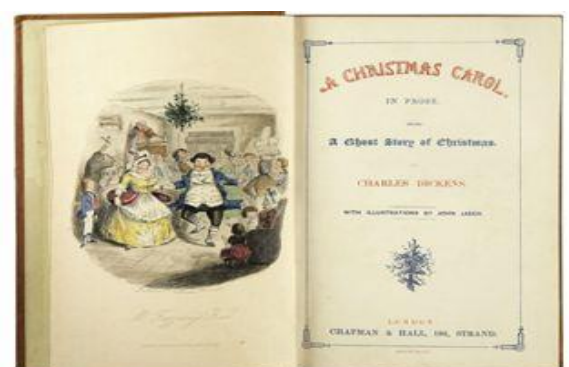
Reflecting back helps us to better look forward. "**Thoughts That Make You Go Hmmm on...A New Year**" provides pithy insights to help you. Such as avoiding the trap; "a New Year's resolution is something that goes in one year and out the other."

Happy New Year!

From Bah to Aha: Five Leadership Lessons from Ebenezer Scrooge

One of my cherished holiday traditions is watching various movie versions of Charles Dickens' much-loved classic, *A Christmas Carol*. Once our grandkids become old enough (a major highlight of last year was all three of our kids each had a baby), I'll be able to watch my favorite version, *The Muppet Christmas Carol*, with them.

So, I was especially delighted to discover and read Les Standiford's book, *The Man Who Invented Christmas*, when a new movie by that title was just released in November. I



thoroughly enjoyed learning about the difficulties Dickens had in publishing what he called "his Ghostly little book" to "haunt their homes pleasantly."

Having had similar difficulties with established publishers, I could understand why Dickens decided to self-publish *A Christmas Carol* in December of 1843. The book got his career and finances back on track, while reinvigorating and popularizing Christmas traditions first in Victorian England and then North America.

There are many life and leadership lessons we can draw from Scrooge the "...squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner" as he goes from "Bah, Humbug" through a series of "aha" experiences. Here are my top five:

1. **Reflection and Renewal** – if we don't step back periodically to review the path we're on we could be rudely awakened. While it's highly unlikely ghosts will haunt us in the night, many problems that keep us awake could have been avoided. The greatest danger today is we're so swamped by daily trivialities -- e-mails, phone calls, meetings, firefighting -- that we lose sight of longer term personal issues like our health, relationships, finances, or well-being.

When crazy busy managers don't invest in skill development, team building, or culture change, scary bad times lurk in the shadows and things will eventually go bump in the night.

2. **Leadership is Habit Forming** – the ghost of Marley, Scrooge's old business partner, shows up wearing a long chain. He explains, "I wear the chain I forged in life... I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I girded it on of my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it." The habits of highly effective leaders skillfully forge chains that pull their teams and organization's forward. Less effective managers shackle themselves and others.
3. **Profit is a Means Not an End** – Scrooge is notorious for his relentless pursuit of profit. The main lesson of the tale is when Scrooge awakens to his naked greed and learns to use his wealth to help others. While some might quibble with Dickens' moralizing, positive psychology research shows that pursuing "the good life" and its materialism -- along with the mounds of debt it often brings -- is a root cause of our soaring depression and suicide levels.

That same research shows those who are most fulfilled and flourishing often transcend materialism toward a deeper sense of purpose and connectedness. But a business that doesn't generate profit won't be around long to do much good. We need both profitable purpose and purposeful profit.

4. **Boost Engagement with Caring and Results** – after Scrooge has his life-changing Christmas Eve experience, he enthusiastically sets out on a new pathway to personal growth on Christmas Day. When he gets back to work what would you suggest he do to increase his clerk, Bob Cratchit's, workplace engagement?

In his entertaining and insightful *Forbes* column, ***Lead Like Scrooge: The Surprising Research Results***, Joe Folkman draws from his leadership assessment research to show that just increasing concern and consideration for Bob won't work. "Nice" leaders who create warm and fuzzy workplaces and feel-good teams that don't deliver results create mediocre engagement levels. The best and most engaging leaders also bring out extra effort with high standards and stretch us to higher achievement levels.

5. **Leverage the Power of Appreciation and Celebration** – the Ghost of Christmas Past takes Scrooge back to his first job working for Old Fezziwig. They see everyone enjoying a raucous workplace Christmas party with music, dancing, food, and beer. As the ghostly visitors watch the merriment the Ghost points out how just a little bit of money was spent on this celebration, "A small matter, to make these silly folks so

full of gratitude."

"'It isn't that,' said Scrooge, 'he has the power to render us happy or unhappy; to make our service light or burdensome; a pleasure or a toil. Say that his power lies in words and looks; in things so slight and insignificant that it is impossible to add and count 'em up: what then? The happiness he gives, is quite as great as if it cost a fortune.'"

Which lessons ring true for you as you prepare to ring in the New Year?

Standiford observes, "Millions of ordinary people continue to experience Scrooge's impossible transformation in one form or another. Some of them will learn of the story of the industrialist who heard Dickens deliver one of his public readings and ran out of the hall on the spot to purchase turkeys for all his employees for Christmas. Odd, a few might think, I got a turkey from my boss just today."

It's That Time of Year: How Strategic is Your Use of Time?

Imagine a large jar filled to the brim with golf balls. Is it full? What if marbles were slowly poured in as the jar was shaken until no more could be added? Now is it full? How about sand being trickled into the jar as it's vigorously jiggled? When the sand reaches the brim is the jar finally as full as it could possibly be?

Now dump all that out and start over with first adding the sand, then the marbles, and finally trying to stuff in all the remaining golf balls. You won't get every one in.



If we start with the big things -- our top or strategic priorities -- and then fit our daily tasks around them, we'll make much greater progress on what really matters. This is much more effective than allowing the sands of minutiae to fill in enough of our limited time that we can't fit in our most important work.

We all start with exactly the same amount of time. Why is it that the best leaders and top teams get so much more done than their counterparts? Poor leaders are often the ones complaining loudest about their lack of time. The title of a study of 500 leaders in *Harvard Business Review* warned, "Beware the Busy Manager."

Highly effective leaders and teams use their time much more effectively. They're more strategic with this vital resource that -- unlike money -- can't be borrowed or banked for future use. When we spend a day, we lose a day.

Time is running out. Another year is winding down. As Father Time gets ready to turn things over to his fresh, young replacement, it's a great time to take stock with a look back and prepare for the New Year by setting our priorities -- choosing the big balls we want to ensure we've put first into our limited space.

We have an assessment to help you and/or your team. Our quiz on **Strategic Use of Time Assessment** is built around what we've found to be the 7 deadliest time traps for leaders:

1. Highly Reactive and Crazy Busy
2. The Acceleration Trap
3. Low Culture/Capacity Development
4. Poor Monkey Management
5. No Time for Coaching Skill Development

6. Working *in* Versus *on* Your Team
7. Falling Down the Meeting Sinkhole

You can use our **Strategic Use of Time Assessment** to look at your personal use of time. It's evolved from our **leadership team retreats** and **workshops** to help leadership teams assess their strategic use of time. So, if you'd like to have your leadership teams complete the assessment and tally up the responses, let us know and we can arrange this complimentary time check for you. You can review the results as a team to discuss how you can better leverage your time to ensure your key priorities all fit into the time you have available next year. We'll send you a list of resources to help you deal with any time traps you and/or your team may have fallen into.

So, was that imaginary jar completely full after adding first the golf balls, then the marbles, and finally the sand? Not quite. You could pour a beer or two over everything and fill the jar to the very top.

This proves that no matter how busy you are, you can always find time for a beer.

Cheers!

Tweet Reading: Recommended Online Articles



This section summarizes last month's LinkedIn Updates and Twitter Tweets about online articles or blog posts that I've flagged as worth reading. These are usually posted on weekends when I am doing much of my reading for research, learning, or leisure. You can follow me on Twitter at

<https://twitter.com/JimClemmer>

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

Further showing the need for big changes in performance management. Feedback skill, context, and delivery is vital.

"Research: Negative Feedback Rarely Helps People Improve" - Scott Berinato, *Harvard Business*

Review, research spotlight

<https://hbr.org/>

It mostly makes them avoid the peers who criticized them.

Poor performance reviews often result from what wasn't done rather than what was -- here's a checklist.

"Top 10 Reasons You Received A Poor Performance Review" -- Joe Folkman

www.forbes.com

"Don't make your performance review just an evaluation of the past, but rather a conversation about the future."

Zenger Folkman research shows how a leader can change their approach to feedback and increase effectiveness.

"You Can Take It! How To Accept Negative Feedback With Ease" -- Joe Folkman

www.forbes.com

"Resisting receiving negative feedback does not make the feedback disappear, nor does it improve your effectiveness: Feedback is a gift, not a punishment. Resisting feedback keeps a person from improving."

An organization's culture ripples out from the team leading it. This is THE leverage point in culture development.

"Change Your Leaders To Change Your Culture" -- Jack Zenger
www.forbes.com

"Even though the leadership team is a relatively small part of an organization, they have enormous influence on its direction and in short, they shape the culture."

Read *The Leader Letter* in Weekly Installments



The items in each month's issue of *The Leader Letter* are first published in my weekly blog during the previous month.

If you read each blog post (or issue of *The Leader Letter*) as it's published **over twelve months you'll have read the equivalent of a leadership book**. And you'll pick up a few practical leadership tips that help you use time more strategically and tame your E-Beast!

Feedback and Follow-Up

I am always delighted to hear from readers of *The Leader Letter* with feedback, reflections, suggestions, or differing points of view. Nobody is ever identified in *The Leader Letter* without their permission. I am also happy to explore customized, in-house adaptations of any of my material for your team or organization. Drop me an e-mail at Jim.Clemmer@ClemmerGroup.com or connect with me on [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), [FaceBook](#), or my [blog](#)!

May the Force (of strengths) be with you!



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