



The CLEMMER Group

Stronger People. Stronger Organizations.

Jim Clemmer's **Leader Letter**

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What if you invited me into your house and I sprayed a noxious gas that made you and your family sick? What if I also dumped a big barrel of stinking sewage on your kitchen floor? You'd likely have me arrested. You'd get out of the house until the mess is cleaned up and the air's safe again.

Yet we watch toxic videos, read poisonous social media feeds, or consume contaminated news. It's making us sick. This pessimism plague is a major contributor to lower mental and physical health.

Psychologist Steven Stosny calls this "headline stress disorder." As he explains, "there's a lot more competition, so the headlines have to get more sensational to grab your interest. And the easiest way to grab people's attention is through fear or anger."

This barrage of negative news makes it seem like the world's going to hell. A survey of people in 17 countries asked, "All things considered, do you think the world is getting better or worse, or neither getting better or worse?" 58% choose worse, and 30% choose neither. Only 11% thought things were getting better. In the U.S., only 6% thought the world's getting better. Another poll of Americans, Canadians, and Australians found that 54% thought our way of life would end in 100 years. A quarter of those polled put the chances of humankind being destroyed at greater than 50%. Now that is sickening.

Does this sound familiar? "We have fallen upon evil times and the world has waxed very old and wicked. Politics are very corrupt. Children are no longer respectful to their parents." Sounds like a recent news feed. It was an inscription on a stone from Chaldea in 3800 BCE.

Over millions of years of evolution, our brains hardwired to keep us on high alert for what might kill us. We're constantly scanning for danger and preparing (i.e., worrying) about how we'll handle a myriad of potential threats. But what kept our ancestors from being eaten by tigers or killed by neighboring warriors is now poisoning us. The stress is killing us.

Ironically -- and tragically -- the purveyors of pessimism call their "news" reality. They're so far from reality they may as well be living on another planet. A very favorite book of mine is Harvard psychologist Steven Pinker's, *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress*. He tells us, "optimists are the true realists, and gratitude for progress is good for your mental health."

In 1783 Benjamin Franklin said, "The progress of human knowledge will be rapid, and discoveries made of which we have at present no conception. I begin to be almost sorry I was born so soon, since I cannot have the happiness of knowing what will be known 100 years hence." Over 200 years later, he'd think we're living in paradise.

Johan Norberg writes in his book, *Progress: Ten Reasons to Look Forward to the Future*, "contrary to what most of us believe, our progress over the past few decades has been unprecedented. By almost any index you care to identify, things are markedly better now than they have ever been for almost everyone alive."

This issue kicks off our new decade with a reality check. You can face the facts with a tiny sample of just how far we've progressed. We are living in the best of times. The world's never been better -- and it's constantly improving.

May you hack through humanity's deep pessimistic neuro programming and realize that we're living the dream.

Lose Those News Blues and Leave the Dark Side: The World's Never Been Better



It's the most wonderful and inspiring time of year. After many hours of researching books, articles, and websites, let's kick off 2020 with what's become my annual New Year's blog on how the world keeps getting better, and better, and better, and better...

This tradition started six 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.**" The next 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.**" After another trip around the sun, we piled on more evidence with "**Don't Get Dragged Down by all the Negative News: Life's Better Than Ever.**" Last year we continued getting real with "**Don't Get Sucked in by the Gloomy Headlines: The World's Getting Better and Better.**"

Here's the tip of a very big research iceberg that's just a tiny sample that this year's research uncovered:

- The 1987 **Montreal Protocol** banning CFCs reversed catastrophic ozone depletion, and the layer is now healing. CFCs are thousands of times more powerful than carbon dioxide. Without this reduction, the earth would be 1.5 times warmer today with a 25% faster rate of sea ice melt. Many see this as a powerful example of nations working together to combat climate change.
- Yale University's **Environmental Performance Index** shows "the world has made great strides in protecting marine and terrestrial biomes, exceeding the international goal for marine protection in 2014" and "three-fifths of countries in the EPI have declining CO2 intensities, while 85 to 90% of countries have declining intensities for methane, nitrous oxide, and black carbon."
- Forest areas have increased by 7% in France, from 26% to 45% in Nepal, doubled in Costa Rica, and China by 4.56 billion m³ between 2005 and 2018 to cover 22% of land area.
- Coal-fired power plants are declining rapidly around the world. Coals shipments in the U.S. are at the lowest levels in almost 40 years, while American clean energy jobs grew by 110,000 last year.
- This year, the cost of new wind and solar generation dropped below the costs of coal and nuclear energy. The U.K. and Germany generated more electricity from wind, sun, and biomass than coal, oil, and gas. In April, the U.S. did the same.
- Prices for battery packs have dropped 87% since 2010. Automakers have committed \$225 billion for electric vehicles in the next five years.
- Single-use plastics, microbeads, Styrofoam, etc. are banned in a rapidly growing number of countries and jurisdictions.
- **The 2019 Social Progress Index** reports, "since 2014, the world average score increased from 61.80 to 64.47, and there has been improvement on eight of 12 social progress components."
- The Global Burden of Disease Report shows the number of kids and teenagers dying around the world decreased by half in the past three decades.
- Global suicide deaths have fallen 38% since 1994.
- Poaching rates in Kenya have dropped by 85% for rhinos and 78% for elephants in the past five years.
- Strokes for U.S. adults over 65 have dropped by a third for each decade in the past 30 years.
- Global rates of measles have dropped by 2/3 from 2000 to 2018.
- Type 3 polio became the second species of poliovirus eliminated in 2019.
- Extreme poverty around the world has dropped from 36% in 1990 to 8.6% in 2018.
- **Save the Children's 2019 Global Childhood Report** shows children's lives have improved in 173 of 176 countries since 2000.
- Today more than 90% of children around the world attend some elementary school.
- The number of people around the world killed in wars fell 43% since 2014.
- **The 2019 Global Terrorism Index** shows deaths from terrorism cut in half in the past four years.
- Annual homicide rates in the 15th and 16th centuries across Europe ranged from 24 to 150 deaths per 100,000 people. Today international homicide rates are 5.3 per 100,000.
- The international homicide rate has dropped 20% since 1990.
- Only 4% of the world's population lived to be older than 65 before the 20th century.
- Since 1900, infant mortality fell by more than 95% in the U.K. and U.S.
- Global food production quadrupled since 1961, while the population has increased two and a half times. Undernourishment fell from 37% in 1969 to 10.9% in 2017.
- The global rates of deaths from diarrheal diseases fell from 62 per 100,000 in 1985 to 22 per 100,000 in 2017.
- Global malaria mortality has dropped by 60% between 2000 and 2015.
- 148 of the 167 countries measured and tracked for prosperity on the **Legatum Institute's 2019 Prosperity Index** (containing 88% of the world's population) have improved since 2009.
- A new treatment for early-stage breast cancer could wipe out a growth in just one treatment.
- Two new treatments for the lethal Ebola virus saved nearly 90% of newly infected people.
- ISIS fighters in Afghanistan are now down to 300 from an estimated 3,000 earlier this year.
- Humpback whales have rebounded from the brink of extinction, going from a few hundred to 25,000.
- Atmospheric acidity is back to 1930s levels in Europe and the U.S.
- In 1920 it took about 10 ounces of materials to produce a dollar of value in the U.S. Today, it takes just 2.5 ounces -- a drop of 75%.

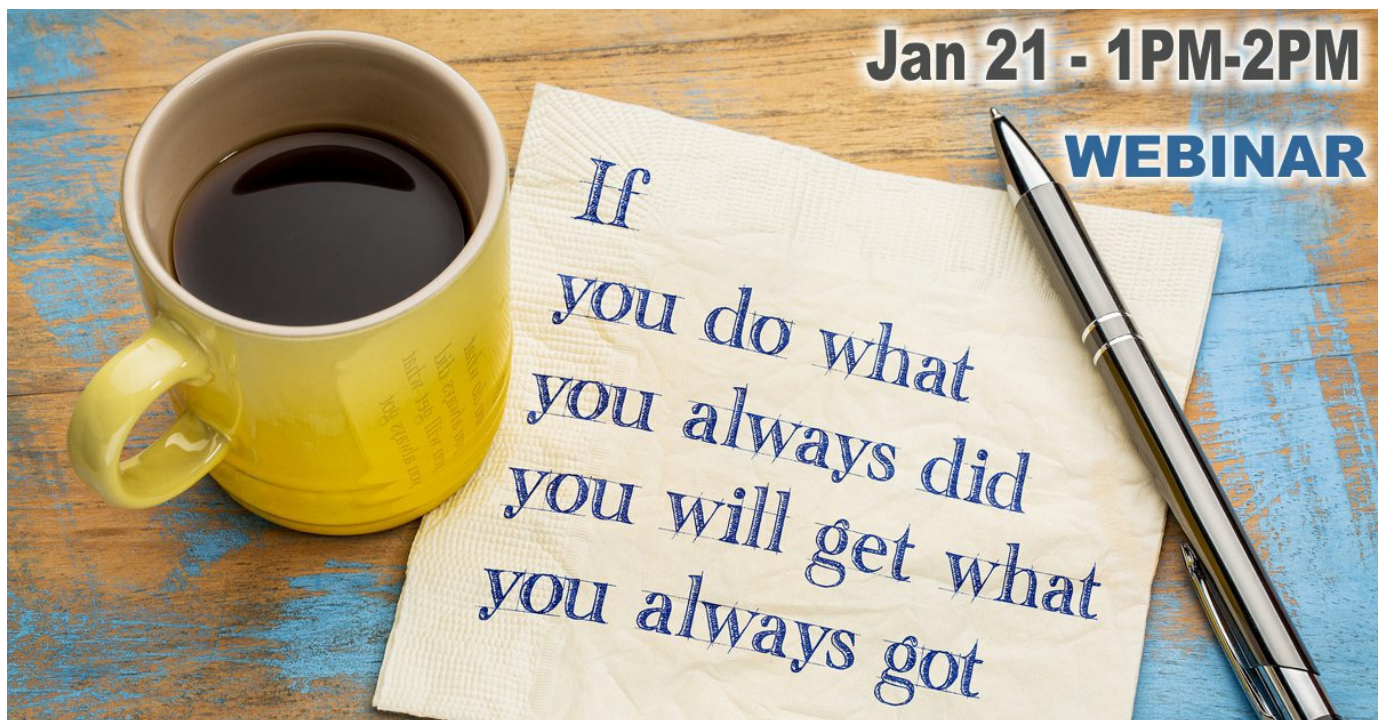
Sources and Further Reading

- **99 Good News Stories You Probably Didn't Hear About in 2019**, Angus Hervey, *Future Crunch*
- *Future Crunch* founders **3 min video clip** on how science and technology is dramatically improving our world
- **Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress**, Steven Pinker. **Click here** for my review of this outstanding book and **Thoughts That Make You Go Hmmm on...Enlightenment Now**
- **Enlightenment Wars: Some Reflections on 'Enlightenment Now,' One Year Later**, Steven Pinker, *Quillette*
- **The Happy Broadcast** - "a counter hate & fear project that features positive news from around the world illustrated by

@maurogatti & friends"

- *The Globe & Mail* article, **Don't Blame Population Growth for Our Pollution Problems**, by the authors of ***Population Bombed!: Exploding the Link Between Overpopulation and Climate Change***
- **News Headlines Getting You Down? Here's How to Protect Your Mental Health**, *Tapestry*, CBC Radio
- **Impending Defeat for the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse**, Ronald Bailey, *HumanProgress*
- **The World Is Getting Better. It's Just That No One Tells You About It**, Jim Geraghty, *National Review*
- **We Need a New Science of Progress**, Patrick Collision and Tyler Cowen, *The Atlantic*
- **Worldviews Are Pessimistic Because They Are Outdated**, Joakim Book, *HumanProgress*
- **When We Saved the Ozone Layer, We Saved Ourselves From Even Worse Climate Change**, *Quarks and Quirks*, CBC Radio
- **Good News**, *MSN*
- **Business as an Agent of World Benefit**
- **Good News**, *Huffington Post*
- **Positive News**
- **Beautiful News Daily** (a go-to-site for my daily dose of reality)
- **The End of Doom: Environmental Renewal in the Twenty-first Century**, Ronald Bailey
- **The Big Ratchet: How Humanity Thrives in the Face of Natural Crisis**, Ruth DeFries
- **It's Better Than It Looks: Reasons for Optimism in an Age of Fear**, Greg Easterbrook
- **The Rational Optimist: How Prosperity Evolves**, Matt Ridley
- **Factfulness: Ten Reasons We're Wrong About the World -- And Why Things Are Better Than You Think**, Hans Rosling – related web site is **GapMinder**: "Almost nobody knows the basic global facts" and TED talk: **How Not to Be Ignorant About the World**
- **Progress: Ten Reasons to Look Forward to the Future**, Johan Norberg
- **The Daily Better: 365 Reasons for Optimism**, Henry Edwards

Webinar: Powerful New Approaches to Leadership and Coaching Development



Would you like to:

- Increase employee engagement by up to 8 times?
- Double/triple motivation to implement a personal development plan?
- Build coaching and leadership skills around natural/authentic strengths?
- Make performance appraisals an inspiring event people look forward to?
- Double rates of improvement from 360 feedback?

What leader or development professional doesn't want those results? But traditional development approaches fall woefully short on delivering these outcomes. Numerous studies report that 80 to 90% of senior executives are extremely unhappy with their leadership development efforts. That's because they don't work.

You don't have to be Einstein to know you drive yourself crazy when you continue doing the same things, but expect different results.

Here are the same-old-same-old traps that lead to the same old results. How many ensnare and impair your development efforts?

- Leaders rarely get unfiltered, anonymous feedback on their effectiveness.
- Development focuses on fixing weaknesses or closing gaps
- Employee engagement levels not directly linked to the manager's leadership effectiveness.
- No map or methodology showing how to leverage existing strengths.
- Little follow through on personal development plans.
- Leadership skills/competencies not weighted to the leader's role and situation.
- Problem-solving discussions direct the coachee to solutions the coach thinks are best.
- Training, mentoring, and coaching mashed together.
- Coaches rarely plan and guide coaching conversations with a step-by-step framework.
- Coach jumps to solving the problem and giving advice.

If you're going to shift leadership and coaching effectiveness, you need to use approaches proven to work. Why don't senior executives and development professionals do that? A big reason is simply ignorance -- they don't know what they don't know. Another reason is traditional thinking -- we've always done it that way.

We became Zenger Folkman partners in 2012 because of their approaches to leadership and coaching development work. *The Extraordinary Leader* and *The Extraordinary Coach* have an evidence-based track record of boosting leadership effectiveness and strengthening coaching skills.

On January 21 at 1PM ET, I am delivering an overview of the key lessons learned from developing thousands of leaders. Many lessons are counterintuitive and challenge conventional thinking. But they're built on a firm research foundation with proven, measurable results.

Click on **Powerful New Approaches to Leadership and Coaching Development** for more information and complimentary webinar registration.

Stop the insanity. Learn how powerful new approaches produce great new results.

On The Leading Edge to Cut Wasteful Employee Engagement Efforts



There's a direct line between levels of employee engagement and service/quality, productivity, innovation, safety, revenue, profitability, and other key results. That's well documented, and most leaders strongly agree.

Where agreement falls apart is how to boost engagement levels. Some leaders feel that running organizational surveys and giving that aggregated data to managers will somehow get them to improve engagement. Like getting data on our weight from an annual doctor visit, little changes if we keep doing the same things.

Other leaders try organizational solutions like flex hours, onsite daycare, social activities, better benefits, senior leadership visibility, boosting interactions such as town hall meetings, etc. Yet a steady stream of studies show employee engagement is stagnating or declining. Leaders keep doing the same things while hoping for different results.

The data on employee engagement is overwhelming and very clear; the biggest factor -- by far -- is the immediate manager. It's become a truism in the organization/leadership development field -- people join an organization, but quit their boss.

Some people quit and leave. But most team members quit -- and stay. This is especially true if pay, benefits, pensions, and the organizational perks are good. Numerous studies show that 60 to 70 percent of engagement levels are directly determined by the team member's boss. That's the heart of the engagement problem.

Last month I delivered a 45-minute **webinar** overview of the key elements in leadership effectiveness that determines outcomes like engagement. This was followed by insightful participant questions and discussion. Click on **The Leading Edge: Transforming Good Managers into Great Leaders** to watch the archived webinar with Q & A. This fast-paced session covered:

- Shift Happens
- Three Critical Change Choices
- Harnessing People Power to Lift Performance
- Timeless Leadership Principles
- Pivot Points: The Power of Building Strengths

We were hired to help an organization shift its culture toward higher performance. Quality and service, productivity, and other results were good but not great. During a focus group with frontline team members to assess their current culture, participants weren't participating. Finally, someone spoke up, "Jim, I think you're confusing us with people who care."

Strong leaders engage and inspire people to care.

Leadership and Life Lessons from the Big Guy in Red...and from Scrooge



The week before Christmas was that exciting time when kids crammed for their big performance review. Where did the big guy watching from the North Pole mark them on the naughty-nice scale? Would it be enough to get them into the next gift bracket?

During the hustle and bustle of cramming, busyness, traveling, and shopping, I offered a few leadership lessons we could learn from Santa.

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 a 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 mean 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 research on the "**soft skills**" of Emotional Intelligence, team spirit, and high-performance cultures shows the payoffs of treating people well.

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 an agile, change adaptive organization** 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 spend a large percentage of their year planning and preparing for the big day. Is it time to **assess how you're using your time**?

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.

Or...how about Life and Leadership Lessons from Scrooge?

A *Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens has never gone out of print since he self-published it in 1843! 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. **Click here** to read my top five.

If you didn't learn from Santa's elf-help manual or Scrooge's ghostly facilitators in December, you can still take time to reflect on what's really important as you head into the New Year.

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> and connect with me on LinkedIn at <https://www.linkedin.com/in/jimclemmer>

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

Jack flips several assumptions and practices most leaders have upside down to switch from a push to a pull mentality.

A Surefire Way to Improve Your Leadership (But Only a Few Will Do It), Jack Zenger, *Forbes*

"It is not time-consuming, it does not require learning anything complex, and it doesn't cost money."

Which are you? Watch the archived webinar to see Joe's latest research and figure out whether you prefer to poke or placate and how to leverage your style.

Webcast: Peacemaker vs Provocateur with Joe Folkman, Zenger Folkman

"Which of these dimensions makes a leader more effective, and which would help leaders generate better results?"

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**!

Live, learn, laugh, and lead -- just for the L of it!



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