

Jim Clemmer's Leader Letter



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JULY 2010, ISSUE 88

Last weekend Canadians (July 1) and the Americans (July 4) celebrated the founding of their countries. Whether we're celebrating the birth of a country, a loved one, or the anniversary of a meaningful relationship, this is a great time to strengthen our "attitude of gratitude."

A number of studies in the fields of happiness, positive psychology, and depression are showing profound and lasting benefits from teaching people the skills of counting their blessings, savoring things, appreciating beauty or quality, looking for the good in each day, and expressing gratitude.

July also marks the beginning of summer vacations for many people around the world. It's an excellent time to recharge and embark on our own re-creation. And summer vacations are a great time to practice what the item in this issue on slowing down to speed up reminds us is so critical to personal, team and organization effectiveness.

GET THE DIGEST, FULL NEWSLETTER, OR EACH ITEM HOT OFF MY BLOG

Last month we reported on the survey results from our new option of making *The Leader Letter* available in a digest format with short intros linking directly back to articles and blog postings on our site. We also conducted a short poll to see how it would be received. 2/3 of survey respondents preferred the digest version or were happy with either version. So we are now offering both.

If you prefer the full version, it will continue to be posted online - [here](#) - as well as a downloadable PDF - [here](#).

Another popular option is subscribing to my blog. This is where every item that makes up the next month's issue of *The Leader Letter* is first posted. You can use the RSS feed or get each posting as an e-mail each time (twice per week) a new blog is posted.

To sign up for blog notifications [visit my blog](#) and enter your name and e-mail in the top left sign-up box.

LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP AND CHANGE FROM SOUTH AFRICA

With the eyes of the world on South Africa for the 2010 FIFA World Cup there have been many media stories on the remarkable progress of the country since abolishing Apartheid in 1994. Last Saturday night Heather and I were looking for a movie to watch at home. We happened upon

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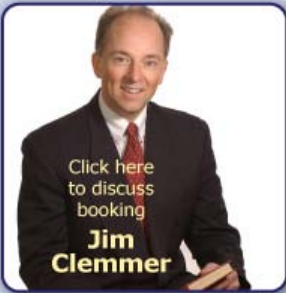
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Invictus starring Morgan Freeman as Nelson Mandela and Matt Damon as Francois Pienaar, captain of the Springbok's rugby team. It turned out to be a very timely and inspiring choice.

The movie is a true story based on John Carlinbook's book, *Playing the Enemy: Nelson Mandela and the Game That Changed a Nation*. It centers around newly elected President Mandela's attempts to reconcile the country's racial divide (and avoid a civil war) through uniting all sides in supporting South Africa's rugby team as they made their historic drive toward the 1995 Rugby World Cup Championship being held in that country. Traditionally, rugby was a white sport with black South African's cheering for the Springbok's opponents and rejoicing in their usual defeat.

Mandela very skillfully uses the World Cup event as a galvanizing opportunity to change deeply entrenched views and redirect the clashing sides toward a common goal. In one of the movie's many powerful leadership scenes, Mandela rushes to a meeting of the new black dominated South Africa Sports Committee and barely convinces them to reverse their decision to change the Springbok name and colors. Later he shows more of the depth of his leadership and drive toward reconciliation in response to his party members bitterly reminding Mandela of the 27 years he spent in prison, and all the crimes and injustices against blacks under Apartheid; "Forgiveness liberates the soul. That's why it's such a powerful weapon. We have to prove we are not what they (whites) fear. We have to surprise them with compassion."

Some of this story's most powerful leadership lessons come from Mandela's first meeting with the Springbok's captain. Responding to Mandela's question on his leadership philosophy, Pienaar says he believes in leading by example. Mandela agrees that's critical. Mandela then challenges him; "How do you inspire a people (or a team) to be better than they think they are?" The inspirational leadership theme builds throughout the rest of the film. Mandela's words, 'visible felt leadership,' and his history become powerful rallying points for ever higher performance.

Mandela also recites parts of a poem to Pienaar which he says gave him the inspiration to persevere during his long imprisonment. Phrases from the Victorian lyric poem (four line and four stanzas), *Invictus* (Latin for unconquered), by William Ernest Henley become a major theme throughout the rest of the movie. The last two lines are; "I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul." To read the poem and background on how Henley penned it as he overcame his personal challenges click on [Invictus](#). To view a dramatic one minute video of Sir Alan Bates reading the poem [CLICK HERE](#).

Nelson Mandela is one of the greatest leadership examples of our time. Here are a few insights (most are from his autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom*) to effective leadership and living from this remarkable "change agent:"

"It always seems impossible, until it is done."

"No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite."

"A good head and a good heart are always a formidable combination."

"I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but

the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear."

"The greatest glory in living lies not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall."

"There is no easy walk to freedom anywhere, and many of us will have to pass through the valley of the shadow of death again and again before we reach the mountaintop of our desires."

On the heels of the agony and ecstasy of the 2010 FIFA World Cup and many of us in Canada and the U.S. having celebrated the birth of our nations, Mandela's life story provides incredible lessons in personal leadership and nation building.

ANOTHER STUDY ON SLOWING DOWN TO SPEED UP

The pace is frenzied - even desperate - in most organizations today. Restructuring, revamping IT systems, and reengineering processes are just a few of the major initiatives driving big changes across organizations. At departmental levels projects, goals and objectives, and operational bottlenecks expand exponentially.

Add today's 24/7 always on and always connected technology, all this frantic activity is overloading and overwhelming many people. Stress and burnout rates are epidemic. And as Edward Hallowell, psychiatrist and the founder of the Hallowell Center for Cognitive and Emotional Health in Sudbury, Massachusetts discovered that all this harried multitasking also makes us less effective (see ["Multitasking Dumbs Us Down and Ups Our Stress".](#))

Now there's yet more evidence that speed slows up and dumbs down organizations as well. The May issue of *Harvard Business Review* reported on a study of 343 businesses (conducted with the Economist Intelligence Unit.) The authors report *"the companies that embraced initiatives and chose to go, go, go to try to gain an edge ended up with lower sales and operating profits than those that paused at key moments to make sure they were on the right track. What's more, the firms that 'slowed down to speed up' improved their top and bottom lines, averaging 40% higher sales and 52% higher operating profits over a three-year period."*

There's an excellent comparison chart in, ["Need Speed? Slow Down,"](#) showing how *"firms sometimes confuse operational speed (moving quickly) with strategic speed (reducing the time it takes to deliver value) -- and the two concepts are quite different."* If you can slow down to read this one page article, it could help you and your organization move strategically faster.

Regular readers of this blog and [The Leader Letter](#) have heard quite a lot from me on this critical topic of personal, team, and organization effectiveness. That's because we're constantly running into this problem as we help Clients with leadership and culture development. Getting management teams to step back and more strategically deal with making team and organizational changes and improvements can be a real challenge. Too many managers want to gallop madly off in all directions.

If you've missed some of my past posts and articles on this topic, here are a few you can read and use to do a speed check:

- [June 2005 issue of The Leader Letter](#) was focused on dealing with priority overload.

- [May 2010 issue of *The Leader Letter*](#) was focused on speed traps, spring clean up, and reducing priority overload.
- [The Learning Paradox: Slow Down to Grow Faster](#)
- ["Reader Reflections on Frantic Busyness, Priority Overload, and The Acceleration Trap"](#)

How do you keep yourself, your team, or your organization focused, balanced, and on track?

ARE YOU READY FOR HUGE CHANGES?

"May you live in interesting times."

Is that an old Chinese curse or a rallying cry to seize new opportunities?

The pace of change is accelerating. Organizations that aren't nimble enough to adapt are failing.

Lehman Brothers was over a century old and considered a "too big to fail" institution. But it fell to pieces over the course of a few days - plunging the whole world economy into an unprecedented free fall.

Today the question isn't "can it happen to my organization?" We now know it can happen to ANY organization. You can prepare yourself to deal with change. [Click here to find out how.](#)

ADVICE TO YOUNG PROFESSIONALS: "I WISH I KNEW THEN, WHAT I KNOW NOW"

Recently I was a panelist at our local Chamber of Commerce Young Professionals meeting. Each of us on the panel was asked to give 10 minutes of reflections to the young professionals starting their careers on "I wish I knew then, what I know now." This was followed by a very spirited and lively question and answer period that had to finally be cut off so everyone could still get home for the last part of their evening.

Boiling down a few key bits of life and career growth advice into 10 minutes was quite a challenging assignment! It forced me to sift through my experiences and material to get to the core essence of what I'd do over or change if I was starting my career again.

Here are the four key areas I identified:

Harnessing the Power of Imagery or Visualization

I first came across the Law of Attraction in 1974. It fundamentally shifted my reality and changed my life. There's now a rapidly growing body of scientific research, such as quantum mechanics and string theory, helping us to understand this incredibly powerful magnetic force. Whenever we think about the future, whether the next few days or longer term, we're visualizing or imagining potential scenarios, actions, and outcomes. The *vital* question is whether we're visualizing a future that's mostly positive or negative. What we focus on sets the polarity of our personal force field.

I've written quite a bit about my experiences with visualization. [CLICK HERE](#) to peruse such articles as "How Visioning Changed My Life," "Visioning Harnesses the Power of our Pictures," "Yield of Dreams" and others.

Building Upon and Aligning To Our Strengths

Most of us intuitively know that being "in the flow" or "in the zone" comes when we're using our core strengths. It would have been helpful to me to have a more explicit understanding of this much earlier in life.

I recommended to the young professionals (as I do many of my audiences) to check out the excellent work of the non-profit VIA Institute on Character (www.viastrengths.org.) This organization was founded to create a scientifically rigorous classification of character strengths and a way of measuring them. The VIA (Values In Action) survey is based on 24 universal character strengths defining what's best about people. The VIA Survey is the result of a three-year effort involving 55 noted social scientists. Approximately one million people have taken the VIA Survey on Character Strengths. Taking the test and aligning our lives to our core strengths is key to health, happiness, and enduring success.

Build a FOD Fund

The more savings we have, the less we're beholden to an annoying boss, the economy, or sudden job loss. Early in my career, I started a "fly off and die" savings fund. This money was to allow me or Heather to tell any bad boss to get lost, and survive a job loss, or start our own business. It's been the fallback factor enabling us to do what we do because we want to - not because we have to. Without this financial cushion, the chances of being exploited by a bad boss or getting stuck in a soul-destroying job are much higher. Debt can be a ruthless master.

I advised the young professionals to be very conscious that as their income rises they don't also raise their standard of living. Keep it constant or even lower. Put all of that additional money into savings. Pay yourself first and have savings automatically deducted from your bank account on pay days, before you have a chance to spend it. Set a target of saving at least 10 percent of your income - shoot for 20 percent or more. Avoid borrowing money and pay off your mortgage as soon as you can. Collect interest; don't pay it. If you can't save up and pay cash for everything else, do you really *need* it or do you just want it? Wants, you can do without.

Hire and Align with Leaders, Beware Followers, and Avoid Wallowers

My latest book, *Growing @ the Speed of Change*, is built around our Lead, Follow, or Wallow model. If I had to do it over again, I'd put even more focus on hiring Leaders, not Followers, and avoid Wallowers like the dangerously infectious people they are. I'd also help our kids earlier in their lives to recognize more clearly the types of people they hang out with and the consequences of those choices to their happiness and well being.

Click on the following links for recent newsletter articles about these basic choices:

- [Five Resolutions to Lead, Not Follow or Wallow in 2010](#)
- [New Habits for the New Year: Move Beyond Wallowing and Following to Leading](#)
- [Getting Out of Wallow Hallow: Helping Co-Workers and Team Members to Stop Groaning and Start Growing](#)

You can also find this model outlined in much more depth in [Chapter Three: Lead, Follow, or Wallow](#) (keep clicking "Next" at the bottom of the pages to read the entire chapter.)

If you knew then what you know now, what would you do differently? Why not start now?

REVIEW OF *THE EXTRAORDINARY COACH: HOW THE BEST LEADERS HELP OTHERS GROW* BY JACK ZENGER AND KATHLEEN STINNETT

I absolutely love this book. It's a unique combination of solid research, relevant and illustrative examples, with lots of practical how-to applications. I don't know Kathleen but I've worked with Jack on and off since 1981. You can read more about our relationship from my blog post "[Reconnecting with Jack Zenger as Guest Blogger: 'The Motivation Myth That Won't Go Away'.](#)" Clearly they've co-authored this book because of the strong alignment of their style, approaches, and experience. I was delighted to read the manuscript Jack sent me earlier this year and provide a supportive "jacket blurb" for it.

Like Jack's previous book, [The Extraordinary Leader](#), (click title to read my review of that book) [The Extraordinary Coach](#) is written in a warm and conversational style. Reading this how-to guidebook feels like a personal coaching session with two highly effective leadership development coaches. The book brims with practical and timely advice distilled from Jack and Kathleen's decades of successful leadership development experience. It is an absolute must-read for anyone wanting to strengthen their leadership and development skills.

This book is chockfull of so many useful observations and advice on coaching it's really tough to highlight just a few. Here are some that particularly stand out:

Coaching Definition

"Interactions that help the individual being coached to expand awareness, discover superior solutions, and make and implement better decisions." They go on to explain, *"Coaching helps individuals discover answers within themselves and helps them feel more personally empowered. The coach is also dedicated to helping to ensure the implementation and long-term follow-through of planned actions."*

What Gets in the Way of Coaching?

The authors find that most managers claim "time," "my boss doesn't coach me," and "my employees don't need it" as the main reasons they aren't coaching as much as they'd like to. This certainly squares with The CLEMMER Group's experiences and common leadership discussions in our workshops.

Jack and Kathleen believe the real reasons are:

- *"Avoiding Potentially Uncomfortable Discussions"*
- *"Insecure about the True Value of One's Own Coaching"*
- *"Misunderstanding the True Nature of Good Coaching"*
- *"Direct Reports Seldom Ask for It"*

No-Time-for-Coaching Doesn't Hold Water

"When asked what gets in the way of coaching employees, managers invariably mention the pressure of time. The reality is that managers are working long hours. Their ranks have been thinned. They are stretched. Their schedules are packed. We are reminded, however, of the two men who are mopping up water from a floor. After working feverishly for hours, one of them finally says, 'Let's stop mopping and go find what is leaking water.'

Managers spend a good deal of time mopping up problems. Coaching is a way to turn off the spigot. It takes only a short leap of faith to say, 'I'll take time to develop and coach my people because in the long run it will pay off more than virtually anything else I can do.'

Mindset and Skill Set

"Coaching represents both a mindset and a skill set. The mindset comes into play for leaders who have a choice in how they guide conversations with employees. Leaders can either direct their employees' actions - in a fairly autocratic mode - or instead coach their employees to discover the best actions to take to move forward. A manager's mindset might be, 'I can get more done by controlling and directing,' whereas a coach's mindset might be, 'I can get more done by growing my employees and gaining their commitment.'

The mindset must precede the skill set. Unless a leader consciously chooses to coach - and chooses 'growth' as a worthy objective of the coaching process and conversations - he will be less likely to fully employ the array of skills that support coaching."

The book provides an extensive number of frameworks, checklists, guidelines, examples, and how-to steps. Practical job aids like pocket or purse-sized "Action Planners" and "key action cards" have proven to be extremely useful. We continually meet workshop participants from years ago who still reference these tools or ask to replace them. Jack and Kathleen cite the surgeon, Atul Gawande's, book, *The Checklist Manifesto*, on the overwhelming evidence that checklists, frameworks, steps, and guidelines are dramatically reducing medical errors. Just as they've done with aviation pilots for decades now.

Here are three useful coaching examples provided in [The Extraordinary Coach](#):

FUEL: A Framework, Not a Cage

| | |
|--|--|
| <i>Frame the Conversation</i> | <i>Set the context for the conversation by agreeing to the purpose, process, and desired outcomes of the discussion.</i> |
| <i>Understand the Current State</i> | <i>Explore the current state from the coachee's point of view; expand the coachee's awareness of the situation to determine the real coaching issue.</i> |
| <i>Explore the Desired State</i> | <i>Articulate the vision of success in this scenario, and explore multiple alternative paths before prioritizing methods of achieving this vision.</i> |
| <i>Lay Out a Success Plan</i> | <i>Identify the specific, time-bounded action steps to be taken to achieve the desired results, and determine milestones for follow-up and accountability.</i> |

The Three steps of Framing the Conversation are:

Identify the behavior or issue to discuss.

Determine the purpose or outcomes of the conversation.

Agree on the process for the conversation.

Three Guidelines for Providing Personalized Feedback

Reinforcing feedback is a wonderful tool for creating greater engagement, it is completely within your control, and it does not require a great deal of planning... here are three guidelines, and we will devote

the rest of this chapter to diving into these and offering examples of their application.

- Reinforce the behaviors and actions that you want the employee to continue and extend (not just the end results that were achieved.)
- Be specific, focusing on what the individual did or said and its impact on you, on others, and on results.
- Provide at least three times as much positive, reinforcing feedback as redirecting feedback. This 3-to-1 ratio seems to be the secret to creating good feelings and improved results.

There are so many more gems to be mined from [The Extraordinary Coach](#). These include letting the people being coached drive much of the coaching agenda, not confusing updates with coaching conversations (a common problem), listening or drawing out versus telling or advising, how the coach owns the process but the person being coached should own the content of the coaching conversation, and how to "let silence do the heavy lifting." Each chapter concludes with a very useful Chapter Summary of the main points just covered.

A boss manages and a leader coaches. We need to do both. But most people in supervisory, manager, or executive roles over-boss and under-lead. The results are lower performance, weaker people, disengaged frontline staff, and stressed out managers. Developing people is at the heart of strong leadership. [The Extraordinary Coach](#) is an extraordinary guide to developing this critical skill set.

THOUGHTS THAT MAKE YOU GO HMMMM ON... COACHING

I've written quite a lot about coaching as a central leadership task. The CLEMMER Group is getting ever deeper into developing and delivering customized coaching workshops, competency models, performance management systems, and the like. I have over 300 citations, quotations, and research papers filed under coaching in my research database. Here are a few:

"You cannot teach a man anything; you can only help him to find it within himself"

- Galileo, 16th Century Italian physicist, mathematician, astronomer, philosopher, and flautist who played a major role in the Scientific Revolution.

"In these high-pressure, tense times, leaders say the 'don't have the time' for coaching. By ignoring this style, however, they pass up a powerful tool... coaching focuses on personal development rather than on accomplishing tasks... coaching creates an ongoing conversation that allows employees to listen to performance feedback more openly, seeing it as serving their own aspirations, not just the boss's interests. Coaches are also good at delegating, giving employees challenging assignments that stretch them, rather than tasks that simply get the job done."

- Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis & Annie McKee, *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence*

"Too many managers focus on fixing people's weaknesses -- or worse, they simply ignore employees altogether. This doesn't boost performance. Gallup has found that if your manager

focuses on your strengths, your chances of being actively disengaged at work are only 1 in 100."

- Brian Brim and Jim Asplund, "Driving Engagement by Focusing on Strengths," *The Gallup Management Journal*

"Great coaches help people do what they don't want to do so they can be the person they want to be."

- Health Centre CEO

"In our latest meta-analysis of 198,000 employees in almost eight thousand business units, employees who strongly agreed that they had a chance to do what they do best every day claimed fewer sick days, filed fewer workers' compensation claims, and had fewer accidents while on the job."

- Marcus Buckingham & Donald O. Clifton, *Now, Discover Your Strengths*

"Managers' chief responsibility lies in helping employees on their team unleash their human potential. No systems, process, or self-directed team - - irrespective of how modern, fashionable, or flawless it may be -- can ever take the place of a great manager. That's because great managers act as the emotional connection between employees and the organizations they work for. In effect, they act as the emotional engineers who set the reactions in place and watch them take affect."

- Curt Coffman and Gabriel Gonzalez-Molina, *Follow This Path: How the World's Greatest Organizations Drive Growth by Unleashing Human Potential*

[CLICK HERE](#) to review a series of my articles and book excerpts on Coaching and Developing.

USING OUR SEARCH ENGINES TO QUICKLY FIND THE TOPIC YOU'RE INTERESTED IN

As a follower of my work, you likely know that we've built a very large web site over the past 15 years. The biggest content areas are over 300 articles, hundreds of blog postings, and over 85 issues of *The Leader Letter*. It's a good thing I love to write or this would really feel like work!

If you've spent time hunting for particular topics on our web site you've likely found that the volume of material now accumulated there can make it tough to quickly find what you're looking for. My response to a recent e-mail from a reader may also help you navigate through my continuously growing work on personal, team, and organizational leadership:

"Our team of supervisors, coaches and manager have a book club meeting regarding [Growing @ the Speed of Change](#) with each of us taking a turn at 'hosting' the book discussion meeting. My turn will be coming in October 2010, and I am responsible for pages 179 to 216 which is chapters XIII to XVII. I was wondering if you could give me tips on how to bring the conclusion of your book to my team with impact.

I am new to facilitation and work at our company where we are dealing with a lot of change both in procedures and systems. So any ideas that you could help me with would be greatly appreciated."

I am always delighted to hear how people are using my books. But it's really tough to provide generalized tips on applying these topics. The chapters she's referring to include *Grow Your Courage*, *Upward Leadership: Leading Your Boss*, *Get Help, Get Connected and Get Persuasive*, *Grow For It*, and *Be an Action Hero*. These topics are quite broad and I approach them in a wide variety of ways in my workshops depending upon the time available, key issues of the group I am dealing with, organizational context/culture, objectives of the session, experience levels and positions of the participants, etc.

Looking for a way to help her broaden her book club discussions and applications of these topics, I suggested she do a search of [The Leader Letter archive](#) for examples or past items/blogs around these topics. For example, type "book club" in the "Search the Archive" box (top of the right column on the main archive page) and up comes a recent example of what another book club group has done. Or she could search "upward leadership" "courageous leadership" or "personal growth" (with the quotation marks) and find a selection of past discussions, examples, or "Thoughts That Make You Go Hmmm" on those topics.

Beside the engine specific to [The Leader Letter archive](#) you can use our main search engine to sort through everything on the site. Look for the "Google Site Search" box on the right side near the top just under my photo. I hope you find lots of *practical* leadership material that's worth far more than you're paying for it!

"SHIFT HAPPENS" VIDEO SHOWS HOW OUR WORLD IS SPINNING EVER FASTER

A fascinating and fast paced five minute video has been making the rounds at a few conferences where I've been speaking recently. Entitled *Shift Happens: Did You Know?* the video uses a series of statistics and examples to show the accelerating pace of change creating our turbulent times.

Here are a few shift disturbing examples:

- The top 10 in-demand jobs in 2010 didn't exist in 2004.
- *"We are currently preparing students for jobs that don't yet exist, using technologies that haven't been invented, in order to solve problems we don't even know are problems yet."*
- The first commercial text message was sent in December 1992. Today the number of text messages sent and received every day exceeds the total population of the planet.
- Years it took to reach a market audience of 50 million:
 - Radio: 38 years
 - TV: 13 years
 - Internet: 4 years
 - iPod: 3 years
 - Facebook: 2 years
- The number of Internet devices in 1984 was 1,000, in 1999 it was 1,000, 000, and in 2008 it was 1,000,000,000.
- There are now five times more words in the English language than during Shakespeare's time.
- It's estimated that 4 exabytes of unique information will be generated this year. That's more than the previous 5,000 years.
- The amount of new technical information is doubling every two years. For students starting a four year degree this means that half of what they learn in their first year of study will be outdated by their third year of study.

[CLICK HERE](#) to view "*Shift Happens: Did You Know?*" and see more examples.

Shift Happens: Did You Know? dramatically illustrates the need for adapting ourselves, our teams, and our organizations to a world of constant and accelerating change. In writing [Growing @ the Speed of Change](#) I researched and developed a number of strategies for dealing with continuous change. These are three central findings and recommendations:

- Accept that life is constant change. There's no getting through or past this "crazy period" to some mythical place of stability, certainty, and a slower pace of change.
- Change just is. It's neither good nor bad. We make changes into good or bad for ourselves by how we choose to look at the situation.
- When faced with tough changes we can lead, follow, or wallow. The higher we lead ourselves and others the better is our health, happiness, and productivity.

Here are a few postings on change you may want to check out (click on the titles) if you missed them the first time or revisit to recheck your change readiness:

- [Change Isn't News \(1:40 video at bottom of this page\)](#)
- [Constant Change: Leadership in a \(Permanent\) Crisis](#)
- [Thoughts That Make You Go Hmm... on Leading at the Speed of Change](#)
- [Thoughts That Make You Go Hmm... on Growing Through Change](#)
- [Built to Change is Especially Critical Today](#)

THE MIRROR OR WINDOW: FINDING THE COURAGE TO STRETCH OUR COMFORT ZONE

Recently I was working with a group of managers in a large, complex organization that was going through big changes. There was lots of learned helplessness, victim thinking, and riding the Bitter Bus into Pity City.

As we challenged each other and explored our fundamental choice to lead, follow, or wallow we discussed the implications and application of each approach. An exercise on how everyone was using their time showed that a vast majority of participants wanted to increase the time they spent in Leading mode.

"Why aren't you spending as much time leading as you'd like to" was the question posed to the group. Our culture, my boss, the economy, shortage of good people, too much e-mail, lack of financial and other resources, no time, not given enough authority, poor communications, and bureaucracy was some of the list they - all too quickly and easily - shot back.

They weren't getting it. Those are all external factors that do play a part. But this was mostly "blame storming." I was emphasizing that leadership is an action, not a position. That's not how true leaders act.

I vaguely recalled something I'd read from Jim Collin's work (author of the landmark books *Built to Last* and *Good to Great*) about looking in the mirror versus out the window as the beginning point for leadership and change. "So those are factors happening out there - through the window," I challenged the response. "What about the factors that you can control by looking in the mirror?"

The analogy connected big time (window versus mirror has quickly become key language in their organizational language since this

session.) Our conversation shifted to what we can control or influence; how we frame problems, our skills, upward leadership, time management, taming the e-mail beast, courageous conversations, seeking the information you need, taking the initiative, asking forgiveness not permission, put up or shut up, and continuous personal growth was part of what's on the leader list.

I knew I'd over-simplified Collin's original analogy so later I went back and pulled from my database:

"The emphasis on luck turns out to be part of a broader pattern that we came to call the window and the mirror. Level 5 leaders, inherently humble, look out the window to apportion credit - even undue credit - to factors outside themselves. If they can't find a specific person or event to give credit to, they credit good luck. At the same time, they look in the mirror to assign responsibility, never citing bad luck or external factors when things go poorly. Conversely, the comparison executives frequently looked out the window for factors to blame but preened in the mirror to credit themselves when things went well."

It's really about courage. Courage is the foundation of leadership. The Greek philosopher Aristotle believed courage was the foundation of all human virtues, because it made the others possible. Our progress up the leadership stairway is strongly determined by the extent of our courage. Are we continually stretching our comfort zone? Are we ready to address personal and professional obstacles blocking our growth? To truly lead we must listen to our inner voice and act on the courage of our convictions.

Do we have courageous conversations? Do we seek feedback that we don't want to hear? Are we open to opposing views or approaches? Do we speak up? What about our courage to address team or organization issues that are impeding progress? It's much easier to be quiet and just go along. And the silence can say it all.

It takes no courage to helplessly point out the window at external factors as the source of our problems. It's classic Wallowing. It takes courageous leadership to look in the mirror. That's acting like a Leader.

Go to [Attitude and Outlook](#) for a selection of articles around this broader topic area.

THE FACEBOOK FACTOR

There are over 450 million accounts on Facebook. Chances are pretty good that you have one of them.

We've recently integrated a lot of the main site and blog into Facebook to make it easier for folks to share and comment on our content and articles.

If you're on Facebook, please take a second to join the [Jim Clemmer page](#).

It's quick and easy. You will also see Improvement Points, blog postings, *The Leader Letter* and any videos that are posted to YouTube in your Facebook news feed as soon as they are published.

It's another way for you to access all my content where and when it's most convenient to you. [Click here](#).

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You can learn more about this series and look at an overview of the audio on the [Firing on all Cylinders audio CD](#) web site page.

READ IT HERE OR HOT OFF MY BLOG

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

MOST POPULAR JUNE IMPROVEMENT POINTS

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

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

"We can't build a team or organization that's different from us. We can't make them into something we're not. Failing to follow this principle is the single biggest reason that so many team and organization change and improvement efforts flounder or fail. The changes and improvements we try to make to others must ring true to the changes and improvements we're also trying to make to ourselves."

- from Jim Clemmer's article, "A Checklist for Changing Me to Change Them"

[Read the full article now!](#)

"A leader typically has a clear mental picture of what success looks like for a particular project or, more generally, for a successful team or the organization as a whole. He or she is able to "emotionalize" that picture and bring it alive for people."

- from Jim Clemmer's article, "More Change Demands More Leadership"

[Read the full article now!](#)

"Strong leaders who are effective coaches know the value of R & R (reflection and renewal). They periodically pull themselves and their teams back from daily work in operations to work on themselves. They are constantly asking questions like "what should we keep doing, stop doing, and start doing to be more effective?""

- from Jim Clemmer's article, "Leaders Focus on Reflection and Renewal"

[Read the full article now!](#)

FEEDBACK AND FOLLOW-UP

I am always delighted to hear from readers of *The Leader Letter* with feedback, reflections, suggestions, or differing points of view. Nobody is ever identified in *The Leader Letter* without their permission. I am also happy to explore customized, in-house adaptations of any of my material for your team or organization. Drop me an e-mail at Jim.Clemmer@Clemmer.net.

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

Jim

The CLEMMER Group

10 Pioneer Drive, Suite 105,
Kitchener, ON N2P 2A4

Phone: (519) 748-1044

Fax: (519) 748-5813

E-mail: service@clemmer.net

<http://www.jimclemmer.com>

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The CLEMMER Group

10 Pioneer Drive, Suite 105, Kitchener ON N2P 2A4

Phone: (519) 748-1044 ~ Fax: (519) 748-5813

E-mail: service@clemmer.net

<http://www.jimclemmer.com>