

# Jim Clemmer's Leader Letter



[JimClemmer.com](http://JimClemmer.com)

[Online Version](#)

[Past Issues](#)

[Practical Leadership Blog](#)

## In this issue...

June 2011, Issue 99

[Change Lessons from The Dutch Golden Age](#)

[The Dutch Polder Model: Focusing on Our Common Goals](#)

[New Consumer Survey Shows Customer Service is Critical to Success](#)

[Review of Still Surprised: A Memoir of a Life in Leadership by Warren Bennis](#)

[Thoughts That Make You Go Hmmm on... Leadership Reflections from Warren Bennis](#)

[Practical Leadership Tips from May's Harvard Business Review](#)

[Draw from Sales Training to Develop Critical Influencing Skills](#)

[The Leader's Digest now Available in French, Portuguese, and Spanish](#)

[Tweet Reading: Recommended Online Resources](#)

[Read It Here or Hot Off My Blog](#)

[Feedback and Follow-Up](#)

## JUNE 2011, ISSUE 99

June is when seasonal change is **sharpest** with the beginning of summer in the Northern Hemisphere and the beginning of winter in the Southern Hemisphere. It brings to mind the popular song, "To Everything There is a Season." The song title is often abbreviated to, "Turn! Turn! Turn!" The lyrics are almost entirely from the Bible's Book of Ecclesiastes and were slightly adapted and put to music by Pete Seeger in 1959.

The lyrics are a timeless reminder of life's rhythms and season:

"To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven;  
A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, a time to reap that which is planted;  
A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;  
A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;  
A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;  
A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;  
A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;  
A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace."

This month's issue provides **a change lesson from Dutch history**, and how **focusing on common goals can break through differences and conflict** to bring us together. **Customer service is a perennial issue** that shifts with the economic and competitive seasons. Now in the winter of his long and productive life, "the father of leadership," **Warren Bennis, shares his life story and leadership lessons** in his highly engrossing memoirs. As technological change speeds up our world and provides new communication tools, we draw **timely and timeless lessons from Harvard Business Review** articles.

Take this time to turn, turn, **turn your attention to the growth – or death – of the skills, habits, and perspectives that will productively move you forward** to your next season of personal, team, or organizational life.

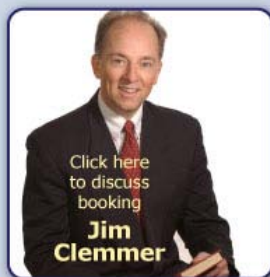


Visit Jim's Site!  
[www.jimclemmer.com](http://www.jimclemmer.com)

### Permission to Reprint

You may **reprint any items** from *The Leader Letter* in your own printed publication or e-newsletter as long as you include this paragraph:

"Reprinted with permission from *The Leader Letter*, Jim Clemmer's free e-newsletter. For over twenty-five years, Jim's 2,000 + practical leadership presentations and workshops/retreats, seven bestselling books, columns, and newsletters have been helping hundreds of thousands of people worldwide. His web site is [www.jimclemmer.com](http://www.jimclemmer.com)."



## CHANGE LESSONS FROM THE DUTCH GOLDEN AGE

Heather and I had ten wonderful days in The Netherlands in April. We began our trip by attending a three day Global Speaker's Summit in the quaint village of Noordwijk on the shores of the North Sea (about 45 minutes from Amsterdam.) The conference brought together speakers, trainers, consultants, and facilitators from across Europe and around the world to share experiences



and perspectives. It was a great time to renew friendships, make new ones, learn about new approaches, technologies, and trends, and share experiences.

Following the conference, Heather and I went to Amsterdam for a week of vacation. The unseasonably warm and sunny weather showcased an enthralling city. We had no idea how much water was in and around Amsterdam. Now it's very clear why it's called, "the Venice of the north!" We took in as many bus tours, canal boat rides, and walks as we could fit into the week.

As an avid history buff, I was especially fascinated by The Dutch Golden Age. This period covered most of the 1600s. It was **a booming time when The Netherlands rapidly became the most dominant and wealthiest nation on earth.** An early "industrial revolution" powered by wind (the country had 10,000 windmills at one point), peat (as they drained bogs and opened up new land), new agricultural techniques, the birth of the modern stock exchange, corporate finance (the Dutch East India Company was the world's first multinational) and revolutionary shipbuilding technologies (such as the sawmill) propelled the Dutch economy to the **highest standard of living in Europe.**

All this prosperity led to a boom in building the city (the architecture of the tall and skinny buildings along the canals is very unique) and cultural activities -- especially paintings. The Dutch Masters became a very large group of painters that were so prolific there were something like 1.5 million paintings produced during this period! The oversupply created many starving artists with incredible talent. I thoroughly enjoyed a day at the Rijksmuseum looking at paintings by Rembrandt and his contemporaries. If you're interested in European art, a wonderful web site that enables virtual viewing of thousands of paintings is the [Web Gallery of Art](#). Take a tour of the Low Countries art and then wander around from there. I've spent hours lost in the many galleries and time periods there.

Like a flower garden, The Dutch Golden Age rapidly blossomed to vibrant life and then quickly faded away. A combination of economic, military, technological, and political factors brought about the country's rapid decline in the early 1700s. **The underlying theme was failure to adapt to a changing world.**



History teaches us time and time again: **today's success carries with it the seeds for tomorrow's failure.** Unless we're constantly pulling out those weed seeds and renewing our growth we can fall straight into the classic "failure of success" trap.

*Further Reading:*

- [Growing with Change](#)
- [From Phase of Life to Way of Life](#)
- [Change Management is an Oxymoron](#)
- [Time Travelling: Current Lessons from Changes Past](#)

## THE DUTCH POLDER MODEL: FOCUSING ON OUR COMMON GOALS

During our April trip to The Netherlands, I was fascinated by the extensive water management skills the Dutch developed over decades of draining and reclaiming land. After learning that **25% of the country is below sea level and 50% is at sea level, it's very clear why this region of Europe is known as "the lowlands."**



Polders are central to the Dutch water management system. These are the sections of land developed after dikes have been built around the marsh or lake and the water pumped out (by windmill before motorized pumps.) The land then sinks as the water is removed. Many roadways are built on the dikes. So as you're driving down the road, you'll often have a polder field on one side 3 - 4 meters below you and a canal on the other side almost at road level. If the dikes aren't well maintained and water isn't constantly pumped out, the polder would revert back to a marsh or lake.

Maintaining this extensive system of 30,000 polders and the intricate web of canals can only happen with **a huge amount of cooperation.** You can't keep your property dry by yourself. Everyone needs to cooperate. During the Middle Ages, **warring cities in the same polder were forced to cooperate to maintain their polders or they'd all be flooded.** This is a very early example of what today is called, "**coopetition,**" with companies both competing and cooperating.

I am ruminating about this on a plane back home after facilitating **a customized version of our [Leading @ the Speed of Change workshop and planning session.](#)** This one also featured "**moose hunting exercises** to identify and address key issues (adapted from our [Moose on the Table](#) approach.) The Client is a very large healthcare organization going through major changes to its structure. They're **moving from a very centralized, top-down structure to a matrix organization** with local zones having more operating autonomy while supported by centralized corporate functions like IT, HR, Finance, and Procurement. Medical and administrative staff are also jointly sharing planning, decision making, and operations to a much greater degree than the old structure with its departmental silos.

This increasingly common organization structure aims to balance local operating autonomy with standardized corporate processes and support systems. It's **a difficult and tricky balance requiring high levels of Emotional Intelligence and the leadership "soft skills" of influence, cooperation, and teamwork.** This session was a first announcement of the change to the top 130 senior executives. The organization is in the beginning stages of clarifying its evolving roles and responsibilities and filling in the boxes on its emerging new organization chart. Anxiety, uncertainty, and stress levels are high as some people

are losing their old jobs and don't know where they are going to fit into the new organization.

As we discussed the changes, the challenges, and the choices to [lead, follow, or wallow](#), one emerging theme was the importance of **staying focused on the greater purpose**. Everyone is here to serve patients, families, and communities. Like the Dutch Polder Model, **strong leaders continually refocus their teams and organizations beyond conflicting internal priorities, overlapping roles, and jockeying for position. We're all in this together to serve a greater shared purpose**. That will keep us all safe and dry.

## **NEW CONSUMER SURVEY SHOWS CUSTOMER SERVICE IS CRITICAL TO SUCCESS**

It's a **classic good news, bad news story**. Consumers are willing to spend from 7 - 22% more for better customer service. But 60% believe organizations haven't increased their focus on providing good customer service. That's slipped from 55% in 2010. And 26% of this group feels organizations are paying less attention to service.



The **American Express Global Customer Service Barometer** survey was conducted in the U.S., Canada, Australia, U.K., India, Mexico, France, Italy, Germany, and Netherlands. "Getting service right is more than just a nice to do; it's a must do...ultimately, great service can drive sales and customer loyalty," said Jim Bush, Executive Vice President, World Service.

Here are some key findings:

- **"78% of consumers have bailed on a transaction or not made an intended purchase because of a poor service experience.**
- **Three in five Americans (59%) would try a new brand or company for a better service experience.**
- **Americans tell an average of nine people about good experiences and nearly twice as many (16 people) about poor ones.**
- **Customers who have a fantastic service experience say friendly representatives (65%) who are ultimately able to solve their concerns (66%) are most influential.**
- **Consumers worldwide value service - but most feel businesses aren't measuring up."**

The survey quotes phrases that are the most irritating to customers. One of my pet peeves is on the list: "Your call is important to us. Please continue to hold."

Go to [Good Service is Good Business: American Consumers Willing to Spend More With Companies That Get Service Right, According to American Express Survey](#) for more information.

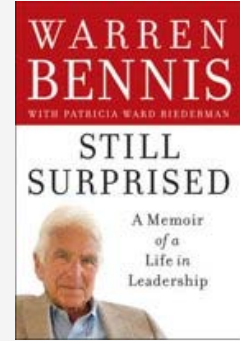
*Further Reading:*

- [The 85/15 Rule: Get at the Root Causes of Poor Customer Service](#)
- [Are You Seeing -- and Hearing -- Your Customers in 3D?](#)
- [From Casual to Moderate to Intense Levels of Service](#)
- [A selection of articles on Customer Service](#)



## REVIEW OF *STILL SURPRISED: A MEMOIR OF A LIFE IN LEADERSHIP* BY WARREN BENNIS

Peter Drucker was often called the father of modern management thinking. **Warren Bennis has been described as the father of leadership.** I've long been a reader of **Warren's books on leadership, change, and team/organization dynamics.** I've often quoted his study findings and leadership wisdom in my books, blog, and presentations. When he said my book, [The Leader's Digest](#), "illuminates the topic of leadership in a useful, readable and lively way," I quoted him even more!



Warren has a long and very distinguished career. His book, [Leaders](#) (the first book of his I read and cited) was named as one of the top 50 business books of all time by the *Financial Times*. [An Invented Life](#) was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. [On Becoming a Leader](#) "is widely considered the top leadership book." *Business Week* named him one of the ten most influential thought leaders.

In [Still Surprised](#) (written with Patricia Ward Biederman), **Warren opens up his life for all of us to learn from his extensive experience.** The book starts with him being thrust into leadership "in December 1944 as the rawest second lieutenant in the U.S. Army, a 19-year-old shavetail trying to keep my platoon (and myself) alive as we pursued the retreating army into Germany." He went on to earn a Bronze Star and Purple Heart.

Each chapter of [Still Surprised](#) centers around major phases of Warren's life and what shaped his thinking. We learn about his decision to attend Antioch College on the G.I. Bill. The next year (1948) Douglas McGregor (best remembered for *The Human Side of Enterprise* and its description of leadership approaches Theory X and Theory Y) became Antioch's president. This began a close mentoring relationship until McGregor's early and sudden death in 1964.

[Still Surprised](#) goes on to explain Warren's move to Cambridge, MA and his scholastic work at MIT that led to a Ph.D. in economics and social sciences. The sections I found especially interesting involved his social sciences experiments and **work with group dynamics to bring about change.** My old Achieve Group partner, Art McNeil, and I worked briefly with Eric Trist and Ron Lippitt in the early eighties when they were in the twilight of their illustrious careers with the UK's Tavistock Institute and National Training Laboratories for Group Dynamics in Bethel, MA ("summer camp for some of the best social scientists in the world".)

I didn't know of Warren's pioneering involvement with those organizations and his work with NTL founder, Kurt Levin, and Abraham Maslow (famous for his Hierarchy of Human Needs.) This work added a much deeper understanding of **the value of groups examining how they function together -- their dynamics -- as a key element in increasing their effectiveness.**

There's much more about Warren's move to Lausanne, Switzerland and work with Europe's Institute for Management Development, provost at SUNY-Buffalo during the turbulent student revolutions of the sixties, and president of the University of Cincinnati. In these fascinating chapters, **Warren models leadership transparency by openly sharing the high and low points of his personal and professional life that brought him huge stress, high growth, and deep insights.** He also chronicles the near impossible demands of leadership, herding the very independent cats of academics and students.

After losing his job at the University of Cincinnati, Warren had a heart attack and spent months in the UK under the care of Charles and Elizabeth Handy (Charles is co-founder of the London School of Business and another outstanding leadership author I've followed for years.) With his 17 year marriage ended, Warren spent "a year at sea (the title of Chapter Seven)" living on a houseboat in Sausalito, CA figuring out what to do next. Then at age 55, hired as a professor of business administration and chair of the Leadership Institute at the University of California in Los Angeles, he began **three decades of what he feels have been the most productive and happiest of his life**. He went on to write a string of bestselling and landmark books drawing from and adding to the themes: **"the nature of leadership, the importance of creative collaboration, how organizations and other groups work, how to effect change, the need to reinvent oneself periodically, and how to create cultures of candor."**

[Still Surprised](#) is a very insightful and inspiring book for leadership/organization development geeks like me. If you're familiar with Warren's work, it fills in much background to his thinking and provides historical context to these fields. **The very personal and open narration of his life journey lays out universal lessons for all of us to reflect upon and learn from.**

## **THOUGHTS THAT MAKE YOU GO HMMM ON... LEADERSHIP REFLECTIONS FROM WARREN BENNIS**

Excerpts from [Still Surprised: A Memoir of a Life in Leadership](#)

"...stories are a powerful tool for engaging others. All of us present ourselves to the world through the stories we invent about ourselves, consciously or not."

"The leader of a group must never get overly involved with its sickest member... the temptation is always there, since the most troubled member is often the most

clamorous and the biggest challenge. But the leader who is hijacked by extreme pathology pays a terrible price. The group will become polarized...focusing on the sickest individual is the worst error a leader can make because it usurps the rightful authority of the healthier members to handle the situation."

"Listening is an art, a demanding one that requires you to damp down your own ego and make yourself fully available to someone else. As a listener, you must stop performing and only attend and process. If you listen closely enough, you can hear what the speaker really means, whatever the words. And paying undivided, respectful attention inevitably makes you more empathetic, one of the most important and most undervalued leadership skills."

"...the truly important things often compete with crisis management for a leader's time, and the truly important things often lose out."

*(From his study of 90 leaders for his book, co-authored with Burt Nanus, [Leaders: Strategies for Taking Charge](#)) "We identified the qualities and behaviors that allow someone to succeed in a leadership role. Among the essential traits we identified were empathy, respect, and insight in dealing with others. I called that emotional wisdom."*



"In *Geeks & Geezers*, now titled [Leading for a Lifetime](#), Bob Thomas and I compared and contrasted leaders under the age of 30 and over 70. We discovered that all had undergone a crucible, a transformative experience that prepared them to lead. We found that adaptive capacity was the single most important attribute for success, whatever the field."

"...candor is essential for organizational health and transparency is inevitable in a world where the Internet has effectively toppled walls and erased physical boundaries."

## **PRACTICAL LEADERSHIP TIPS FROM MAY'S HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW**

I've been an avid reader of [Harvard Business Review](#) for over 35 years. It's often filled with **leading edge research, thoughtful observations, and useful approaches to personal, team, and organization leadership**. Every few months an issue like May's comes along bulging with lots of great articles that I file in my electronic database.



The regular "Defend Your Research" feature has a very useful article entitled, ["Effective Managers Say the Same Thing Twice \(or More\)."](#) A team led by Professors Tsedal Neeley and Paul Leonardi "shadowed 13 managers in six companies for 250 hours, recording every communication the managers sent and received. The researchers discovered that **one of every seven communications by the managers was completely redundant with a previous communication using a different technology**. They also saw that the managers who were deliberately redundant moved their projects forward faster and more smoothly."

In ["The Power of Small Wins"](#) Harvard professor Teresa Amabile and researcher and consultant Steven Kramer discovered that the best way to motivate people to do creative work is to "help them take a step forward every day... **nothing contributed more to a positive inner work life (the mix of emotions, motivations, and perceptions that is critical to performance) than making progress in meaningful work...**the key is to learn which actions support progress -- such as **setting clear goals, providing sufficient time and resources, and offering recognition** -- and which have the opposite effect."

The theme of the May issue is "how to get more done." ["Being More Productive"](#) features an interview with two authorities on personal efficiency, David Allen, the author of the bestseller, *Getting Things Done*, and Tony Schwartz, the author of the bestseller, *Be Excellent at Anything* and the CEO of The Energy Project.

### **Here are a few of their personal productivity tips:**

- Today we need to relearn the skill of balancing high periods of focus with intermittent renewal. Work intensely for 90 minutes and then take a break.
- Four primary dimensions of energy:
  - Fitness, nutrition, sleep, and rest
  - Cultivating positive emotions in yourself and others
  - Gaining more control of your attention
  - Defining your purpose and what really matters to you
- Napping drives productivity.
- Don't cram your head with things to remember. Download all this onto master project or to-do lists.

- Always do your most important task or project for the day first thing in the morning when you're well rested and least distracted.
- Don't let e-mail suck away your attention and dictate your time.
- Break big tasks down into next actions.

## DRAW FROM SALES TRAINING TO DEVELOP CRITICAL INFLUENCING SKILLS

Persuasion and influence skills have always been a big part of leadership effectiveness. In today's complex and matrix organizations **these skills are central to our success**. There are many people and situations that we don't have direct control over. This could be upward to more senior leaders, outward to our peers and other departments, and increasingly toward our team members or direct reports who want to be convinced, not told, what to do.

A reader of [Growing the Distance](#) recently e-mailed me to outline how they are using our [Influence Index](#) outlined in that book, in their long and complex sales process of selling software to food processors:

"We have taken your [Assessing Our Ability to Influence Others](#) process and are using it after each sales meeting to help us focus on what task we need to accomplish to move an engagement forward to a positive sale, and which engagement we should walk away from earlier as we have little to no chance of influencing that potential customer. You could likely put together a full day seminar just on this chart."

I began my career in sales at Culligan Water. I then entered the training and development field as a sales trainer for Dale Carnegie Training and Culligan. My early days at The Achieve Group (now AchieveGlobal) were heavily focused on selling -- and training our Account Managers to sell -- our training programs to large, complex public and private sector organizations. In that work I came across Bob Miller and Steve Heiman's extremely helpful book, [Strategic Selling](#). I found the approaches so useful I became certified to deliver their training program based on its concepts.

How often do you catch yourself thinking "I keep trying to tell them, but they won't listen to me?" There are likely very good reasons they're not listening. **A large sub-set of leadership "soft skills" involves selling our ideas to others. What are you learning from the discipline of sales skills to get more people to listen -- and to act?**

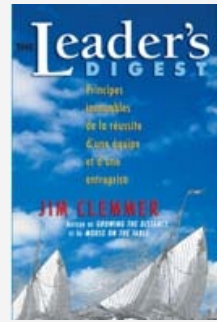
*Further Reading:*

- [Thoughts That Make You Go Hmmm... on Influencing Others](#)
- A selection of articles on [Communicating, Motivating, and Influencing](#)
- Blog posts on [Communicating, Motivating, and Influencing](#)



## THE LEADER'S DIGEST NOW AVAILABLE IN FRENCH, PORTUGUESE, AND SPANISH

In working with Clients to build leadership development programs around the [Timeless Leadership Principles](#) in *The Leader's Digest* we've just **translated this book into French and Portuguese**. The **Spanish** version was completed a few years ago.



Order [The Leader's Digest](#) in all of these languages through our [web site](#) or from your favorite bookseller!

*French Edition:*

*The Leader's Digest: Principes immuables de la réussite d'une équipe et d'une entreprise*

*Spanish Edition:*

*The Leader's Digest: Principios que no mueren con el tiempo para el éxito de equipos y la organizacin*

*Portuguese Edition:*

*The Leader's Digest: Principes immuables de la r ussite d'une  quipe et d'une entreprise*

amazon.ca

amazon.com

amazon.co.uk

amazon.fr

Chapters

Indigo

BARNES & NOBLE  
BN.com

## TWEET READING: RECOMMENDED ONLINE RESOURCES

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



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

**Hiring for attitude and cultural fit** is an overlooked approach so critical to the ongoing success of high-performing organizations.

[Is it better to hire for cultural fit over experience?](#) - **Ethan**

**Rouen, Fortune**

<http://management.fortune.cnn.com>

"The ideal candidate may become a disaster if he doesn't fit company culture, but how do you screen for something as nebulous as cultural fit?"

Many of my workshop participants don't realize that **upward leadership is as critical a skill as leading their teams.**

[5 ways to manage your autocratic boss](#) - Annie Fisher - *Fortune*

<http://management.fortune.cnn.com>

"Got a boss who's too bossy? You can turn that to your advantage, says a veteran HR executive. Here's how."

A review of 140 empowerment studies since 1995 conclusively shows that **partnering and involving staff has huge payoffs.**

[The multiple benefits of empowerment](#) - Brian Amble, *Management-Issues*

<http://www.wv.management-issues.com>

"A new study has confirmed that workers who feel empowered by their employers have higher morale and are more productive, regardless of their industry, job role or even their culture."

## 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."



## FEEDBACK AND FOLLOW-UP

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

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

Jim



**Please post or forward this newsletter to colleagues, Clients, or associates you think might be interested – or on a 'need-to-grow' basis. If you received this newsletter from someone else, and would like to subscribe, click on the link below:**

**<http://www.jimclemmer.com/newsletter>**

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](mailto:service@clemmer.net)  
<http://www.jimclemmer.com>