

THE LEADER LETTER

Leading with *STRENGTH*

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JUNE 2013, ISSUE 123

The American Society for Training and Development recently asked 10 "of the biggest names in the industry" to weigh in on the past, present, and future of the profession. ASTD's conclusion from this input was *"the need for skills development, the importance of learning and development, and the link between employee performance and organizational success have remained strong during the growth of the training and development (T&D) profession."*

In looking at how the profession has evolved over the past 70 years, one of ASTD's 10 experts, Jack Zenger, pointed out that trainer values, messages, approaches, are now much more aligned with senior leaders today as training is more focused on helping the organization achieve its objectives. Another expert added that training is evolving from the classroom to the boardroom as trainers get better at helping their organizations become more profitable and competitive.

When asked what's been one of training and development's greatest legacies, Jack Zenger points to the practical research showing the most critical factors creating high individual and team performance. Leadership development that drives organizational results has been one of the things I recall most vividly about our previous work with Jack stretching back to the eighties and early nineties. This was a driving factor in their work when Jack partnered with Joe Folkman around 2000. One of their greatest legacies will be how they've brought evidence-based approaches



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to leadership development and evolved the fledgling strengths-based moment from a **philosophy** to a science-based **methodology** with their Competency Companion Development Guide.

Jack foresees **"continuing the trend toward evidence-based solutions rather than having training dominated by the latest bestseller. Savvy clients want data about the outcomes of learning and development efforts. At the same time, the focus will continue to shift to permanent behavior change in place of insights and good feelings. Knowing and feeling do not always lead to changed behavior, and organizations will constantly move toward changed behavior as the goal."**

This month's issue brings you more research and evidence-based approaches to leadership and organization development. Some of it may surprise you -- like recent ZF research on how demanding leaders are also more likable. As more organizations are using competency models for leadership development there's a growing misconception -- that I used to share -- on their use. We'll also continue looking at powerful research and approaches to using feedback -- both as the receiver and giver. And recent *Extraordinary Coach* workshops are highlighting the monkeys-gone-wild problem -- Monkey Madness -- overloading and overwhelming so many managers.

I hope this issue helps you avoid groping around like a blindfolded monkey lacking feedback and using unproven approaches!

DEMANDING LEADERS ARE MUCH MORE EFFECTIVE - AND MORE LIKABLE

Leadership likability has many meanings. And the implications go much deeper than whether a leader has lots of "Like" button clicks.

Zenger Folkman's research shows that leaders who score high on the Likability Index are also rated as being highly effective leaders by their direct reports, peers, manager, and others. These ratings correlate to sharply higher employee satisfaction and engagement, sales, customer service, safety, productivity, quality, and profitability.



In their latest *Harvard Business Review* blog post, [I'm the Boss? Why Should I Care if You Like Me?](#), Jack Zenger and Joe Folkman refute the common misconception that leaders can be

highly effective without being likable. One of their studies involving 51,836 leaders showed that does happen -- but only in 1 out of 2,000 cases! Those odds are hard to like! Jack and Joe also outline seven key steps for leaders to substantially increase their likability.

ZF's Likability Index goes beyond an engaging personality and strong interpersonal skills. It also includes attributes such as integrity, problem solving, inspiring and motivating others, and honesty. [Click here](#) to see the complete list and take a self-assessment of your personal likability.

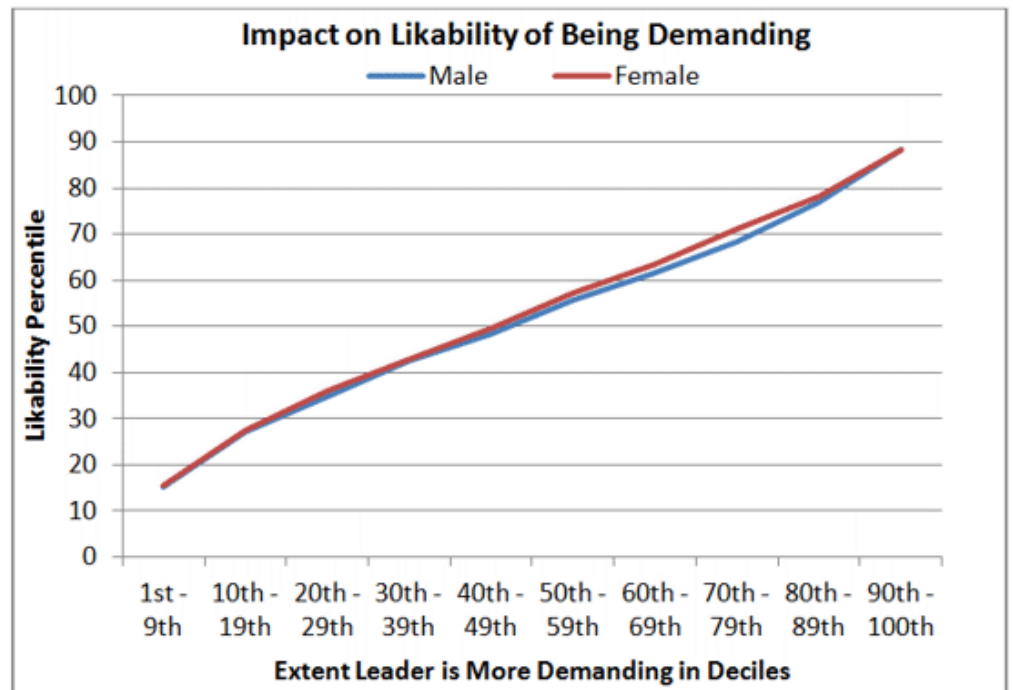
A second set of misconceptions has emerged from this discussion; demanding leaders are less likable -- especially if they're women. This point was raised recently in a blog post by Marianne Cooper a sociologist at the Clayman Institute for Gender Research at Stanford University. She was the lead researcher for the book, *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*, by Sheryl Sandberg and declared that "success and likability are positively correlated for men and negatively correlated for women."

To look deeper at this issue Zenger Folkman studied this question in their database of 360 assessments on over 50,000 leaders. This data is based on an average of 13 raters (managers, peers, direct reports and others) for each leader. The evaluations aren't abstract constructs but rather real people that the raters know well and work with every day.

For this study ZF's "Demanding Index" included these items:

- Establishes high standards of excellence for the work group.
- Is skillful at getting people to stretch for goals that go beyond what they originally thought possible.
- Keeps people focused on the highest priority goals and objectives.
- Does everything possible to achieve goals.
- Creates an atmosphere of continual improvement in which self and others push to exceed the expected results.

Many people would expect to see that the more demanding a leader is the less likable he or she might be. The findings clearly refute that misconception. The graph below shows that demanding leadership has an almost perfect correlation to likability. And there's virtually no variability between men and women.



Like quality, service, or excellence, likability and demanding are often in the eye of the beholder. How we define those terms has a big impact on our conclusions. If demanding means "pushes too hard," "manipulative," "overly aggressive," or even "bullying," then likability -- and effectiveness -- will likely plummet.

The data shows that extraordinary leaders produce outstanding results through being **both** highly demanding **and** highly likable. You've got to like those findings.

A COMMON MISCONCEPTION HAMPERING LEADERSHIP SKILL DEVELOPMENT

In recent keynote presentations and workshops with HR and leadership development professionals, more and more participants have been embracing the approach of building on strengths. When presented with the powerful evidence and logic of strengths-based leadership development, most people are convinced.



But it's tough to let go of deeply ingrained practices and "conventional wisdom." One participant recently sent me an e-mail after a session with this comment:

"There is certainly value to building on strengths. However, I rarely notice mention of key competencies required for any management role and the absolute need to demonstrate all

of these competencies. The inability to demonstrate key competencies cannot be overlooked, no matter how great one builds on existing strengths."

I used to think the same way. My leadership books and our decades of leadership development work were built around the same belief: outstanding leaders demonstrate most if not all the skills of a leadership framework or competency model. It's a bit daunting and exhilarating to be proven wrong with a growing mountain of research and first-hand experience as we work to develop extraordinary leaders.

Skills or competencies vital to a leader's role often need to be focused on. What's so revolutionary and powerful about Zenger Folkman's groundbreaking research on strengths-based leadership development is that leaders don't need to be superheroes and demonstrate all or even most of the competencies.

If a leader is perceived as seriously deficient in a leadership competency that's critical to their role, he or she needs to develop that skill. Otherwise this is a "towering weakness" that others can't see past to his or her strengths.

Fortunately, few leaders are in that position. Our research clearly demonstrates that developing just 3 competencies from good to great (90th percentile) will boost overall leadership effectiveness to the 80th percentile of 50,000 leaders in our database. Taking just two more competencies to great or profound strength (for a total of 5 out of 16) moves that leader to the top 10% of all leaders worldwide! This is part of the mind bending shift in thinking I've gone through in the past year. You can read my changing perspectives and big shift in thinking at "[Manifesto for a Leadership Development Revolution](#)".

This shift from a weakness-focused approach has huge implications for traditional approaches to leadership competency models. I wrote about that in "[Leadership Competency Models: Why Many Are Failing and How to Make them Flourish](#)".

YOU ARE HERE: MULTIPLE FEEDBACK POINTS LOCATE OUR LEADERSHIP SKILLS

We're currently facilitating a customized version of *The Extraordinary Leader* development sessions with hundreds of supervisors and managers in an organization using just self-assessments. Executives in this company had very negative past experiences with using 360 feedback assessments. They agreed that



those experiences came from the all too common weaknesses-based approach grounding most 360 feedback tools used today.

As Joe Folkman outlined in his recent *Forbes* column, "[Workplace Feedback: A Puzzle? A Punishment? Or a Gift?](#)" the experiences of these executives with feedback sounded like a combination of a punishment and puzzle. So we agreed to proceed with using only self-assessment as a first step in a multi-year leadership development process.

During this first workshop series participants are introduced to the revolutionary power of using a strengths-based approach. We're also discussing Zenger Folkman's research showing that self-assessment is only half as accurate as assessment from others. And we look at how difficult it is to locate and magnify our leadership strengths unless we get feedback on what those strengths are perceived to be. In leading and influencing others, perception is all there is.

At the end of each modified *Extraordinary Leader* workshop executives have asked us to poll participants on whether they'd now like to get 360 feedback on their leadership. So far, over 90% have voted in favor of getting this very valuable gift for their leadership development.

As Joe explains in "[Workplace Feedback: A Puzzle? A Punishment? Or a Gift?](#)":

"We all need feedback to be successful. We're like a GPS: With only one satellite, the GPS can't predict your location. With only self-insight to rely upon, you can't be sure if you're 'in line to become the Janitor or the CEO.' An accurate location requires 3-4 satellites -- in career terms, an accurate understanding requires feedback from managers, peers, colleagues, direct reports, and others."

STEPS TO LEVERAGING THE POWER OF TWO-WAY FEEDBACK

My last blog looked at using multi-rater feedback to pinpoint our leadership location. This is proving to be twice as accurate as self-assessment in identifying leadership strengths that we can magnify toward exceptional leadership.



Not only does feedback help leaders build strengths -- or identify fatal flaws that could derail their career -- asking for and responding to feedback creates a powerful shift in perception of everyone around the leaders. See ["Feedback's Huge Impact on Perceived Honesty and Integrity"](#) for an intriguing look at research on how making a real effort to improve based on feedback dramatically escalates a leader's perceived honesty and integrity.

Extraordinary leaders not only look for opportunities to get feedback, they're also skilled at giving feedback. Zenger Folkman's research shows the powerful impact of feedback on percentile scores of employee engagement:

- Manager neither asks for, nor gives feedback 29%
- Manager doesn't ask, but gives feedback 34%
- Manager asks to receive feedback, but doesn't give feedback 48%
- Manager both asks for and gives feedback 74%

The last line shows what a dramatic impact two-way feedback has on boosting employee engagement. What's not shown in this study is how the quality of feedback given by managers impacts engagement. No doubt, higher quality feedback will send engagement levels soaring even higher.

In his *Forbes* column, [The 7 Best And Worst Criticisms From A Boss \(And Why They Matter So Much\)](#), Joe Folkman provides a list of seven "worst critiques" or feedback from a manager balanced with a list of seven "best critiques" or much more effective feedback.

Use Joe's worst critiques as a handy checklist to determine how many of these traps you and/or the managers in your organization fall into. Then use Joe's seven how-to examples for the best feedback as a very helpful primer in framing feedback to be the most constructive and useful. These approaches dramatically increase the likelihood a leader's feedback will be heard and acted upon with a resulting increase in engagement.

How are your feedback skills? How about the leaders in your organization? How do you **know**? Are you getting multi-rater feedback on your feedback skills?

BREAKING THE MANAGER-EMPLOYEE DEPENDENCE SPIN CYCLE

During last month's first public workshop (these sessions are usually run in-house) of *The Extraordinary Coach* in Calgary, the lights came on for a manager from a technology company. Like many managers -- and especially those in very technical organizations -- Dave viewed coaching as directing, advising, and training his direct reports. Since he was promoted because of his deep technical expertise, he defined his role as the top technical problem solver in his team. That commonly held view -- by both him and his team members -- put Dave into this spin cycle:



Manager-Employee System: Creating Dependence

Behavior: Listens to problems; gives advice; expects results



Behavior: Complains about what's not working;
hopes for solutions and advice from manager, who can
ultimately take responsibility

Dave was working harder and harder as he tried to stay on top of all the issues in his department. His team members were pushing most of their problems -- especially technical ones -- up to him. His coaching sessions and performance review sessions, as with many managers, left the ownership of most issues with him. He was increasingly frustrated by team members' failure to follow through on the commitments and plans Dave set with them.

The lights came as Dave realized he was doing most of the talking -- consisting mainly of telling -- in these sessions. So the plans set with team members were really his directives. That led to a repeating series of follow up sessions as he prodded and pushed for team members to meet the plans and commitments set with Dave. He now realized he was getting nominal compliance but not real commitment. He was spinning his wheels and looking for a new approach.

Sound familiar? For more on this cycle and breaking out of it see [The Extraordinary Leader: Turning Good Managers into Great Leaders](#), or our [Building Extraordinary Coaching Skills](#) archived webinar.

HOW MANY MONKEYS ARE ON YOUR BACK?

We've just seen in the article above how Dave, a recent participant in *The Extraordinary Coach* workshop, realized he'd locked himself into an ever increasing cycle of taking on more and more of his employees problems. He was getting busier and busier while his employees were getting ever more frustrated waiting for him to solve their problems.



This all too familiar problem was identified decades ago in a *Harvard Business Review* article by William Oncken Jr. and Donald L. Wass entitled, "*Management Time: Who's Got the Monkey?*" Their powerful metaphor has become a common way to describe a big trap ensnaring many harried and overworked managers.

When an employee approaches or emails his or her manager and says, "Hey, boss we've got a problem," they've got a monkey on their back and want to get rid of it. When both players are caught up in the vicious Manager-Employee Dependence Cycle the employee is looking to take the monkey from his or her back and give it to the boss. While spinning in this dependence cycle an unspoken agreement between both players is that the manager was promoted and gets paid to solve problems. So the less effective manager allows the monkey to climb onto his or her back. This frees up -- and perhaps even rewards -- the employee to hunt for more monkeys to bring back to the boss.

Meanwhile back in the stressed out and overburdened manager's office -- which is looking like a zoo -- ineffective monkey management has created reactionary crisis management and short-term fires to be put out. Caring for and feeding the monkeys -- and keeping them from making a complete mess of the manager's work life -- has become a fulltime job.

Here are a few signs of managers caught in Monkey Madness:

- Managers are overwhelmed by emails, meetings, phone calls, and urgent priorities.
- There never seems to be any time for longer term development.

- The manager does most of the talking when working with an employee to deal with operational problems/issues.
- The manager is frustrated by low employee ownership of problems/issues and having to continuously check-up on their progress.
- Employees fail to meet deadlines and keep commitments.
- Coaching discussions center on the manager providing performance feedback and giving advice.

How many monkeys are on your back or ripping your office apart? How's your monkey management?

MONKEY MANAGEMENT: CREATING EMPOWERMENT AND GROWTH

So how do we break out of the vicious Manager-Employee Dependence Spin Cycle? In their excellent book, [*The Extraordinary Coach: How the Best Leaders Help Others Grow*](#), Jack Zenger and Kathleen Stinnett outline this virtuous Empowerment and Growth Cycle:



Creating Empowerment and Growth

Behavior: Asks questions; encourages risk taking and innovation; empowers employees and trust them to solve their problems.



Behavior: Examines his/her own problems; determines possible solutions to take; assesses risks; makes decisions; takes calculated risks.

This cycle reverses the downward spiral of Monkey Madness and creates an upward spiral to extraordinary performance. In Chapter Two, "Empty Cup, New Tea," Jack and Kathleen suggest leaders reflect on these questions to examine their underlying beliefs and mental models on coaching employees:

1. What are your underlying beliefs about your employees -- their potential, their contribution, and their interest in growing and developing themselves?

2. How do you believe that you add value in your role in coaching your employees (and colleagues)? Are there other ways to add value that you have not tapped into yet?
3. What would you like your contribution to be? What role would you envision for yourself that would bring out the best version of yourself and your employees?

Based on your responses, this chapter goes on to offer these suggestions to reverse your cycle:

- Ask what support the individual is looking for regarding the problem at hand.
- Ask what solutions the individual has already thought about trying.
- Ask the individual for her assessment of the pros and cons of the path being considered.
- Encourage risk taking and innovation.
- Allow experimentation and solutions that might not have been your first preference.
- Push the authority for larger decisions down to capable employees.
- Reward and support positive improvements.

So the next time one of your team members approaches you with a monkey, respond along the lines of, "That's an ugly little monkey you've got there. How can I help you manage it?" This is step one in shifting from being a zookeeper toward becoming an extraordinary coach.

SIX ESSENTIALS TO CREATING AN EXTRAORDINARY CULTURE

How would you describe the organizational culture of your dreams? What are its essential elements? How would people treat each other? What core values would shine brightly every day? If you could eavesdrop on members of your team describing their workplace at a family gathering or social event, what would you hope they'd say?



We often lead exercises like this during executive planning retreats. We'll then gather all the descriptions together and cluster them for key themes. This collage becomes "snapshots of our preferred future" and provides an ongoing and energizing focal point for defining core values, identifying desired and undesired behaviors across the organization, aligning systems and processes and focusing Strategic Imperatives.

This month's *Harvard Business Review* features research by Rob Goffee, emeritus professor of organizational behavior at the London Business School and Gareth Jones, a visiting professor at the IE Business School, in Madrid. Their work evolved from three years of research on authenticity and effective leadership. This led to searching for what conditions create the most authentic workplaces. They call that "the organization of your dreams."

In "Creating the Best Workplace on Earth," Goffee and Jones report they "*found six common imperatives. Together they describe an organization that operates at its fullest potential by allowing people to do their best work ... in a nutshell, it's a company where individual differences are nurtured; information is not suppressed or spun; the company adds value to employees, rather than merely extracting it from them; the organization stands for something meaningful; the work itself is intrinsically rewarding; and there are no stupid rules.*"

The six essential elements they uncovered are:

1. Let people be themselves.
2. Unleash the flow of information.
3. Magnify people's strengths.
4. Stand for more than shareholder value.
5. Show how the daily work makes sense.
6. Have rules people can believe in.

Given all our work with Zenger Folkman and our [Strengths-Based Leadership Development System](#) over the past year it's not surprising to see magnifying people's strengths is essential to building an extraordinary culture. It's in the sub-title of ZF's latest book, [How to Be Exceptional: Drive Leadership Success by Magnifying Your Strengths](#).

Goffee and Jones also report on research showing that highly engaged employees are 50% more likely to exceed expectations than the least engaged. Companies with those highly engaged employees have 54% higher employee retention, 89% greater customer satisfaction, and four times the revenue growth. Our research shows even sharper differences in many cases.

We've also seen that helping leaders uncover and magnify the 3 - 5 natural strengths that others see in them means moving their effectiveness from good to great (the top 10% of leaders in our global data base). Those leaders create dream teams and extraordinary cultures.

TWEET READING: RECOMMENDED ONLINE RESOURCES

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



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

Jack provides an interesting possible explanation for the universal desires people from all cultures around the world have of their leaders.

["Is What We Need From Leaders Prewired Into Our Brains?"](#) -- Jack Zenger
www.Forbes.com

"When you travel the globe you are impressed by how similar people are in their wants and psychological needs. Maybe its genetics that explains it all."

A previous post that asks a crucial question when introducing Zenger Folkman's highly acclaimed leadership book.

["Are You an 'Exceptional' Leader - Does It Even Matter?"](#)
-- Joe Folkman
www.cnbc.com

"What's the single most effective way to increase the revenue of your organization? Increase the skills of your leaders. These are the results our own organization has proven by compiling the data from more than a decade of analysis using 360-degree evaluation reviews."

With media focused on ego-centric leaders and many people believing strong leaders take charge, humility and servant leadership is slipping.

["Why Isn't 'Servant Leadership' More Prevalent?"](#) -- HBS Working Knowledge - James Heskett
<http://hbswk.hbs.edu>

"With servant leadership, a leader's primary role is to serve employees. Everyone from Lao-Tzu to Max De Pree thinks this a wonderful model. Why then, asks Professor James Heskett, is this style so rare among CEOs?"

This research underscores the role of emotional intelligence or the "soft skills" so vital to leadership effectiveness.

["Ten Fatal Flaws That Derail Leaders"](#) - Jack Zenger and Joe Folkman, *Harvard Business Review*
www.hbr.org

"These sound like obvious flaws that any leader would try to fix. But the ineffective leaders we studied were often unaware that they exhibited these behaviors. In fact, those who were rated most negatively rated themselves substantially more positively."

READ THE LEADER LETTER IN TWICE WEEKLY INSTALLMENTS

The items in each month's issue of *The Leader Letter* are first published in my twice weekly [blog](#) during the previous month.



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

FEEDBACK AND FOLLOW-UP

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

May the Force (of strengths) be with you!

Jim





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