

THE LEADER LETTER

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JUNE 2014, ISSUE 135

I enjoy playing baseball and I am a big fan of the sport -- especially the Toronto Blue Jays. So far this year, the Jays are tantalizing their fans with their winning ways. We can only hope it continues right into September!



Recently, I was facilitating an [Extraordinary Leader](#) workshop. This process is based on the rapidly emerging and innovative new field of strengths-based leadership development. As we discussed how it differs from traditional gap/weakness-based approaches discussion turned to professional baseball for parallels and insights.

Some professional baseball competencies include pitching, throwing, catching, hitting, bunting, running, stealing bases, strategic thinking, deciding on what pitch to throw, knowing the opposing team/players skills, and the like. No major league team tries to build a well-rounded player who's outstanding at everything.

Each position has a few key competencies that define the effectiveness of that role. An obvious example is pitching. An outstanding pitcher will be one of the most highly valued and paid players on the team. No one cares that much (especially in the American League with its designated hitter) about how well he hits or runs the bases. Or if a player has a 90th percentile batting average and has the highest RBI (runs batted in) on the team -- he'll be excused for being a slow base runner or mediocre fielder.

Baseball's a great example of how a few towering strengths vastly overshadow weaker areas. We used this discussion to focus on the myth of the well-rounded leader. Our research shows that extraordinary

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leaders are defined by a few profound strengths. Rarely are they well-rounded and exceptional at all leadership competencies. The key is to be extraordinary at the key skills that matter most to the position they're playing.

This issue compiles my May [blog posts](#). Our lead story is about finding your "20 seconds of brilliance" and choosing the right development goals by building on strengths. It also features my review and excerpts from one of the foundational books on positive psychology, *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom* by Jonathon Haidt. The science of positive psychology shows that a key element of happiness and well-being is building strengths.

Play ball!

FIND AND BUILD ON YOUR "20 SECONDS OF BRILLIANCE"

In one of my recent LinkedIn updates (connect with me at <http://ca.linkedin.com/in/jimclemmer>) I featured Peter Aceto's inspiring *Globe & Mail* article on the gold medal power of positive thinking. I especially loved his example of how Debbie Muir coached the Canadian synchronized swimming team to a gold medal. The team was struggling with their three-minute performance. On reviewing video of the routine she found "20 seconds of brilliance."



Traditional coaching and training would have focused on the remaining two minutes and 40 seconds to improve that performance. Instead Debbie focused the team on those 20 seconds of brilliance to leverage their confidence and performance. She built on strengths to move them from good to great.

In a recent *Forbes* column, Jack Zenger, reflects on a key learning from his five decades of pioneering work in the leadership field. In, "[One Secret for Greatness: Choose the Right Leadership Development Goals](#)", Jack poses a key question; "*what's the right target for your own leadership development goals? Chances are, your best opportunities for breakout success will come from magnifying your greatest strengths, not from miring in the areas where you tend to be weak. If you're willing to make an improvement, why not aim for the stars?*"

Last month's Toronto public workshop using [The Extraordinary Leader](#) development system was filled to capacity. Once participants [resisted the lure of "the dark side"](#) of weakness-based approaches many were inspired and guided toward leveraging their strengths.

We just added new dates for [The Extraordinary Leader](#) and [The Extraordinary Coach](#) public workshops in Toronto on June 25 and 26. In these sessions, I will help participants determine existing strengths (and possible fatal flaws) with an easy on-line 360 multi-rater assessment before the workshop. We then apply our research-based road map to help leaders find the most effective route to build on 3-5 existing strengths. On June 26, I will coach leaders in building coaching skills built around our well-proven four-step FUEL model.

You can watch my 60 minute webinar overview of the approaches used in both workshops at [Building Leadership Skills and a Coaching Culture](#). See our [Coming Events](#) section for more information on the workshops.

Spotlighting and building strengths boosts leaders from bright to brilliant.

THRIVING IN TURBULENT TIMES

Turbulence means disorder, chaos, and instability. Turbulent times are unpredictable, disruptive, and confusing. Sound familiar? Yes. It sounds like life.

While it's tempting to want stability, predictability and orderliness, be very careful what you wish for. Writer, academic, journalist and scholar of early modern English literature Germaine Greer warns, *"Security is when everything is settled. When nothing can happen to you. Security is the denial of life."*

Our greatest and most challenging turbulence comes with loss. That might include loss of a loved one, a job, health or mobility, a relationship, finances, certainty, or power and control. *"Loss is nothing else but change, and change is Nature's delight,"* Emperor Augustus observed. Although we might like Nature to delight us more gently or less often, loss itself is neither good nor bad. It is what it is. How we deal with it determines whether it's good or bad. We can become bitter or better. Turbulence can be the hallmark of the best of times or the worst of times. The choice is ours.

To thrive on turbulence is to be vibrantly alive. To avoid turbulence is to wish life away. We must find ways to harness this powerful energy force for positive change throughout our personal and professional lives.

A critical element of dealing with change -- and vital to leadership effectiveness -- is hope. In a *Psychology Today* article, "The Remarkable Power of Hope," Joseph T. Hallinan a Pulitzer Prize-winning writer cites research studies showing that when we have hope *"it can carry us. When we don't, we can drown."*



One of the experiments he discusses took place years ago -- when the ethical standards for laboratory animals were lax -- with rats placed in water tanks and forced to swim or drown. Those rats that were pulled from the water just before drowning, held for a few minutes, and put back in the water survived much longer than the rats left to believe their situation was hopeless. Hallinan concludes, "*there are obviously many differences between humans and rats. But one similarity stands out: We all need a reason to keep swimming.*"

When we, or those we lead feel the rat race (or rat swim) is overwhelming and we're drowning, hope is a vital life giving force. Hope can transform us from victims to victors.

MANAGING TIME LIKE MONEY

I am facilitating a series of leadership development and organization effectiveness sessions for 200 middle managers and senior executives of a public sector organization. One of the key issues we've focused on is the growing "expectations gap"-- customers/clients are expecting more services while paying the same or less taxes. Of course, this doing-more-with-less pressure is a universal factor pushing hard on every organization in almost every sector today.



One of our core workshop exercises is "[Finding the Right Balance](#)" between time spent solving technical problems or applying technical expertise (for which most managers were promoted and continue their career advancement), management systems, processes, data, analysis, planning (including interacting with screens such as through e-mail), and leadership activities such as face-to-face or verbal communications, coaching, team development, modeling vision and values, building personal connections, or inspiring action.

As with hundreds of other groups where we've used this exercise, the vast majority of participants want to spend less time on technical and management and much more time in leadership. As we discuss why they're not leading as much as they'd like to, many start with pointing at external factors (my boss, floods of e-mail, meetings, administrative demands, and the like). We then force a deep look in the leadership mirror: what could I be doing to take back control of my time and shift my balance toward more leadership? This dramatically changes the conversation and moves participants toward leadership action.

The May issue of *Harvard Business Review* has an insightful article reporting on Bain & Company's recent study of the time budgets of 17 large corporations. *Your Scarcest Resource*, starts with "time is money, but few organizations treat it that way." The authors point out that most

organizations have disciplined procedures for financial management but time goes largely unmanaged.

Three problems identified in the study are "Companies are awash in e-communications," "Meeting time has skyrocketed," and "Dysfunctional meeting behavior is on the rise." In our sessions we discuss the enormous time lost to these three areas and how to reverse this huge resource drain.

Time is a more scarce resource than money. If organizations budgeted and reported on their use of time the same as their finances we'd be spending our time a lot differently.

Further Reading:

- ["Five Steps to Making Time for the Work That Matters"](#)
- ["Measuring the E-mail Beast"](#)
- ["Taming the E-Mail Beast"](#)
- ["Thoughts That Make You Go Hmm...on Meeting Effectiveness"](#)
- A series of blogs on The Acceleration Trap, slowing down to speed up, stop doing lists, and the like at [Goals and Priorities](#)

USING DATA TO DEAL WITH VOCAL SQUEAKY-WHEELS

Is your meeting or team too often dominated by one vocal person who forcefully pushes his or her point of view as if they're speaking on behalf of everyone else? Do you often suspect their position is not shared by most others but find he or she has hijacked the discussion? Do you have people update



you on a meeting or training session that you didn't attend and make it sound like one issue or discussion dominated the entire discussion?

Recently, I facilitated a management team offsite retreat that featured ["moose hunting exercises"](#) (like elephant-in-the-room or dealing with "800 pound gorillas") to identify and address key issues. As touchy issues were raised many participants were either reluctant to speak up or their introverted communication style caused them to hold back from a free flowing discussion.

This is where gathering and debating data is so critical. At a few key points when we were trying to determine the size of an issue or how widely shared a person's vocal views were within the executive team, we did a few simple data gathering exercises. One variation involved drawing a scale of 1 – 9 with #1 being no problem at all, #5 a moderate problem, and #9 being a massive Bull Moose sized issue. Participants

then wrote on a piece of paper the number they felt sized this problem. These anonymous votes were then collected and tallied. In a few cases, the discussion veered away from a few vocal minority points of view to what the team felt was the real issue.

Simple processes like this aren't rigorous data-based methods. But they help to sort the vocal minority from the silent majority. As Quality guru, W. Edwards Deming, originally taught in what's now morphed into Lean/Six Sigma approaches, this separates "the vital few" from the "trivial many." That's a key step in avoiding the squeaky-wheel problem to get at root causes and avoid tinkering with symptoms.

CASH DISINCENTIVE: HOW MONEY CAN KILL MOTIVATION

A few months ago I had a lengthy and very engaging conversation with freelance writer, Diane Peters, on using money as a motivator. She's just published an excellent article in *CPA Magazine* with further research and practical tips on this critical management issue.



Here are a few of Diane's key points from "[Cash Disincentive](#)" that really stood out:

- Instead of stewing over numbers, put your energy into great management practices to make sure the non-monetary aspects of the workplace are as motivating as possible.
- Be careful about hiring people motivated by pay increases. Carefully screen for values and motivations that align with organizational culture.
- One study showed that when staffers know they will get a reward, it reduces their motivation for the task by 36%.
- Money is a poor substitute for great leadership. If you run your team using the best practices of business management, money can be transformed from a perplexing problem into a tool used sparingly.

I've researched and written extensively on reward and recognition. You can find a series of my book excerpts and articles at [Recognition, Appreciation, and Celebration](#). At the bottom of the page is an article on how "[Weak Leaders Try to Use Money As a Motivator](#)".

I've also written a series of blog posts on this topic at <http://www.clemmergroup.com/newsletter/category/recognition-appreciation-and-celebration>. There's a link to a study referenced in *Fortune* ("Motivate Without Spending Millions") you might want to read

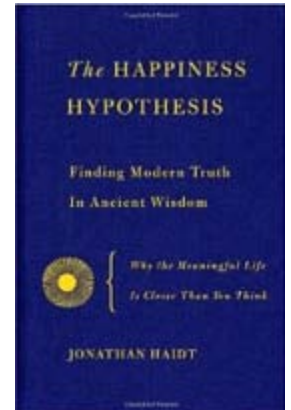
in the post "[Avoid Motivation Madness: Little Rewards and Small Recognition can Produce Big Payoffs](#)".

Below a certain point the lack of money or perceived unfairness is demotivating. But once most people feel they're fairly compensated, money fades to the background. Then recognition, celebration, and appreciation become much more energizing.

REVIEW OF *THE HAPPINESS HYPOTHESIS*

The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom by Jonathon Haidt

I was drawn to this book because Jonathon set out to identify the origins of the burgeoning field of positive psychology in ancient wisdom. Drawing on classical thought from India such as the Upanishads and Buddhism, Chinese philosophers, Mediterranean like the Old and New Testaments, Greek and Roman philosophy, and the Koran he structured the book around "ten Great Ideas."



A social psychologist specializing in morality and moral emotions Jonathon also teaches positive psychology at the University of Virginia. This background leads to the breathtaking scope of the book covering the divided self, change, reciprocity, fault finding, the pursuit of happiness, love, adversity, virtue, divinity, and meaning of life. The broad tapestry Jonathon weaves together is fascinating, colorful, and often insightful. Other times it gets disjointed and confusing.

His central metaphor illustrates the book's key concepts and is itself an ancient idea updated with modern research; our minds are divided into two parts like a rider on the back of an elephant. *"I'm holding the reins in my hands, and by pulling one way or the other I can tell the elephant to turn, to stop, or to go. I can direct things, but only when the elephant doesn't have desires of his own. When the elephant really wants to do something, I'm no match for him."*

He intended to only use the rider and elephant imagery in the first chapter, The Divided Self, to examine the divisions of mind/body, left/right, new/old, and controlled/automatic. Continuing the analogy through the book provides a strong illustration of the fundamental approaches embedded in positive psychology on getting our conscious rider and sub-conscious elephant in sync.

The book's conclusion on the elusive search for happiness boils down to balancing *"a yin-yang formulation: Happiness comes from within, and happiness comes from without.... The East stresses acceptance and*

collectivism; the West encourages striving and individualism. But as we've seen, both perspectives are valuable. Happiness requires changing yourself and changing your world. It requires pursuing your own goals and fitting in with others. Different people at different times in their lives will benefit from drawing more heavily on one approach or the other."

THOUGHTS THAT MAKE YOU GO HMMMM ON THE HAPPINESS HYPOTHESIS

...when it comes to goal pursuit, it really is the journey that counts, not the destination. Set for yourself any goal you want. Most of the pleasure will be had along the way, with every step that takes you closer... we can call this 'the progress principle': Pleasure comes more from making progress toward goals than from achieving them.

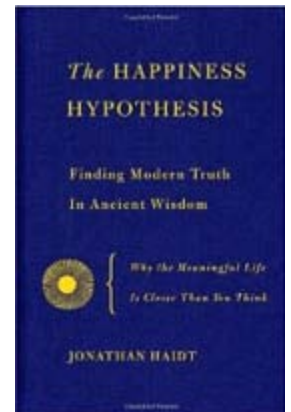
The condition that is usually said to trump all others in importance is the strength and number of a person's relationships. Good relationships make people happy, and happy people enjoy more and better relationships than unhappy people ... conflicts in relationships -- having an annoying office mate or room-mate, or having chronic conflict with your spouse -- is one of the surest ways to reduce your happiness.

(Aristotle) was saying that a good life is one where you develop your strengths, realize your potential, and become what it is in your nature to become.

Here's my favorite idea: Work on your strengths, not your weaknesses. How many of your New Year's resolutions have been about fixing a flaw? And how many of those resolutions have you made several years in a row? It's difficult to change any aspect of your personality by sheer force of will, and if it is a weakness you choose to work on, you probably won't enjoy the process. If you don't find pleasure or reinforcement along the way, then -- unless you have the willpower of Ben Franklin -- you'll soon give up.

But you don't really have to be good at everything. Life offers so many chances to use one tool instead of another, and often you can use a strength to get around a weakness.

If you can engage your strengths, you'll find more gratification in work; if you find gratification, you'll shift into a more positive, approach-oriented mindset; and in such a



mindset it will be easier for you to see the bigger picture -- the contribution you are making to a larger enterprise -- within which your job might turn into a calling.

Each of us thinks we see the world directly, as it really is. We further believe that the facts as we see them are there for all to see, therefore others should agree with us. If they don't agree, it follows either that they have not yet been exposed to the relevant facts or else that they are blinded by their interests and ideologies.

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:

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 a leadership book. And you'll pick up a few practical leadership tips that help you use time more strategically and tame your E-Beast!

Powerful strength-building examples with affirmations and Debbie Muir's inspiring use of "the 20 seconds of brilliance" to win gold.

["The Gold Medal Power of Positive Thinking"](#) -- Peter Aceto, CEO, Tangerine Bank (subsidiary of Scotia Bank)
www.theglobeandmail.com

"Being consistently focused on the negative leads to a decline in the energy and productivity of our teams and the individuals on them. We need to spend more time focused on what is going right."

In the midst of crazy busy schedules and priority overloads, reflective learning is more critical than ever.

["Reflecting on Work Improves Job Performance"](#) --
Carmen Nobel, HBS Working Knowledge
Hbswk.hbs.edu

"New research by Francesca Gino, Gary Pisano, and colleagues shows that taking time to reflect on our work improves job performance in the long run."

Strong leaders bring hope and focus on the positive possibilities -- especially in the darkest and most threatening times.

["The Remarkable Power of Hope"](#) -- Joseph T. Hallinan
www.psychologytoday.com

"Studies show that when we have it, it can carry us. When we don't, we can drown."

Joe gave a complimentary webinar on this research in May. [Click here](#) to access it.

["Does Gen Y Really Want Honest Feedback?"](#) -- Joe Folkman
www.forbes.com

"Even though they say they don't need it, Gen Y workers really do want to hear praise, recognition and positive remarks along with the corrective feedback they receive."

FEEDBACK AND FOLLOW-UP

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

May the Force (of strengths) be with you!

Jim





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