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In the fall of 2016, the Chicago Cubs ended a 108 year drought to win the World Series. Television ratings soared by 50% as baseball fans everywhere were caught up in this dramatic and engaging story.

In their World's Greatest Leaders rankings, *Fortune* magazine ranked Cubs president, Theo Epstein, as #1 leader for orchestrating this turnaround. In his book, *The Cubs Way: The Zen of Building the Best Team in Baseball and Breaking the Curse*, *Sports Illustrated* senior baseball writer, Tom Verducci chronicles the five-year rebuilding plan Epstein used to win the World Series. The center of his approach was "a deeper understanding of important human qualities among his players -- the character, discipline, and chemistry that turn skilled athletes into leaders -- enabled Epstein to engineer one of the most remarkable turnarounds in sports."

Epstein saw how a *Moneyball* approach steeped in data and analytics succeeded and then collapsed into toxic infighting when he was with the Boston Red Sox. When he joined the Cubs, Epstein asked his scouts to look deep into each prospective player's character. He demanded pages of detailed character reports from interviews with just about everyone who knew the player. He supplemented this with analytics and statistics to find, and build the team around, players with the best balance.

Verducci observed, "they never stopped searching to find edges, but they made a fundamental decision early after coming to Chicago that the one edge they could exploit was found in a very old-school resource: people." Said Epstein, " If we can't find the next technological breakthrough, well, maybe we can be better than anyone else with how we treat our players and how we connect with players and the relationships we develop and how we put them in positions to succeed."

Over 2,000 years ago in ancient Rome, Cicero, pointed out "it is not by muscle, speed, or physical dexterity that great things are achieved, but by reflection, force of character, and judgment." Some things -- like fundamental human values -- never change.

This issue looks at a few core character elements of outstanding leaders. A Chinese Buddhist text tells us, "from intention springs the deed, from the deed springs the habits. From the habits grow the character, from character develops destiny." What we repeatedly do and practice becomes our leadership habits that form our character.

And the leaders of an organization form a collective character. This ripples out to become the organization's culture.

Five Steps to a High-Performance Culture

Aesop, the ancient Greek fabulist and storyteller observed, "After all is said and done, more is said than done."

Culture change is a perfect example. Many leaders proclaim culture change is a key strategic objective. And for good reason. Culture's been well proven as a critical "soft" factor that produces hard results.

Signs of a low-performing culture include declining engagement levels, rising absenteeism, a high "eye roll factor" for vision, mission, and values, higher turnover, declining customer satisfaction, resistance to change, low trust and teamwork, decline in quality and rise in errors, and poor safety performance.

But decades of studies continue to consistently show that up to 70% of culture change efforts fail. Despite all that's said about culture change, not much is being done in most organizations.

We first began helping organizations with culture change in the early eighties. Over the years, we've seen major transformations where lots was done, and too many efforts where lots was said, but little was done.

Our earlier work was documented in two books, *Firing on All Cylinders: The Service/Quality System for High-Powered Corporate Performance* and *Pathways to Performance: A Guide to Transforming Yourself, Your Team, and Your Organization*. Over the past dozen years, we've boiled much of this research and experience down to five key steps:

1. **Vision, Core Values, and Purpose/Mission** – this is the foundation of any culture development work. The three key questions are: Where are we going? What do we believe in? Why do we exist? These need compelling emotional hooks that connect with the heart of leadership.

2. **Supervisors/Managers/Executives Leadership Behaviors** – an organization's culture ripples out from the team leading it. What leaders do overshadows everything they say. Defining specific behaviors and cascading them to the frontline for each core value is a vital part of this step.

3. **Management Processes/Systems** – daily operations and organizational practices signal "how we do things around here." Do leaders "snoopervise" or trust people? Do systems and processes help or hinder serving customers? Does the structure, compensation, promotional practices, performance management, operational methods, communication, etc. block living the vision and values?

4. **Front Line Staff Leadership Behaviors** – leadership is an action, not a position. Powerful cultures engage, enable, instruct, and inspire front line performers. Energizing "Our Way" programs delivered and modelled by leaders outline expected behaviors and provide ongoing coaching.

5. **Continuous Improvement Activities and Organization Development** – practices, procedures, and training for continually developing people, processes, and operations are embedded. This step connects back to the first one and closes the loop on a feedback rich and highly engaged culture.

Visioning a high performance culture without effective action is hallucination. Talk without strong follow through perpetuates the delusion. As American naturalist, poet, and essayist, Henry David Thoreau said, "If you build castles in the air, your work need not be lost: That is where they should be built. Now put foundations under them."

Further Resources:

- **Culture Change articles, blogs, and webinars**
- *Leading a Peak Performance Culture* webinar
- *Executive Team Building and Culture Development* webinar

Centralization versus Decentralization: Are You Asking the Right Questions?

Operating inside the centralized versus decentralized paradox and finding the right balance has been a perpetual conundrum for many organizations. Deciding which model to use is often a values issue centered on issues of control, trust, and autonomy.

We're working with a high growth international resources company acquiring and adding new sites and divisions across the globe. Their new CEO is leading a major culture shift. Part of that transformation is moving to a decentralized model with head office functions serving the local business units.

A strategy retreat of these key leaders was set up to agree on the company's evolving "decentralized model." A key starting point was getting agreement on the roles and responsibilities of the local business units and the roles and responsibilities of each corporate function in providing local service and support as well as corporate governance. To prepare for these discussions and move the corporate leaders toward serving the local business units, functional leaders needed perceptions and feedback on their function's effectiveness along with current and expected services.

Albert Einstein once said, "If I had an hour to solve a problem and my life depended on the solution, I would spend the first 55 minutes determining the proper question to ask, for once I knew the proper question, I could solve the problem in less than five minutes." In preparing for a strategy retreat with corporate function and local business leaders an assessment survey was developed.

Time and effort was invested in developing assessment questions that best framed the issues/opportunities and prepared everyone for the planning discussions. This survey was designed for learning and development only. It wasn't being used to measure performance or hold leaders accountable. Each local business unit rated each corporate function. Each functional leader also rated each corporate function including their own.

Their ratings were confidentially sent to us and only we saw the ratings and comments. We tallied the ratings and provided corporate functional leaders with a feedback summary along with personal one-on-one coaching. The focus was on helping corporate leaders prepare a development plan on how their function could best serve and support the local business units.

In conjunction with the confidential ratings each local business unit provided for each corporate function, they were also asked these questions for each function:

- *Please list the 3 to 5 most effective corporate services provided*
- *Please identify any critical shortcomings or serious gaps of this corporate function*
- *What additional services should this function provide to improve local usefulness/service levels?*
- *Other comments/observations/suggestions*

If you're leading a support function like HR, IT, engineering, accounting, procurement, safety, training/OD, etc. you might want to use a variation of these questions. You could have a neutral third party consolidate and feedback the responses or use an anonymous reporting service like SurveyMonkey.

This is **"servant leadership"** in action. As Baseball Hall of Fame player and manager, Casey Stengel (nicknamed "The Old Professor"), put it, "managing is getting paid for home runs someone else hits."

4 Behaviors That Differentiate High-Performing Executives

The May-June issue of *Harvard Business Review* reports on an extensive 10-year study of "What Sets Successful CEOs Apart." 14 researchers led by professors Steven N. Kaplan at the University of Chicago and Morten Serensen of Copenhagen Business School, drew from a database of assessments of 17,000 C-suite executives including more than 2,000 CEOs. The detailed assessments of every executive included performance appraisals, information on patterns of behavior, decisions, and business results with every executive. Some of this was supplemented with personal interviews with business associates.

This is a very comprehensive study that's widely applicable to any C-suite leader or upcoming managers aspiring to senior leadership positions. Among results challenging common stereotypes was that introverts tended to slightly surpass extroverts and almost all leaders had made major mistakes. 45% of the CEO candidates "having at least one major career blowup that ended a job or was extremely costly to the business."

Four behaviors emerged as differentiating skill sets. "Roughly half the strong candidates (who earned an A overall on a scale of A, B, or C) had distinguished themselves in more than one of the four essential behaviors."

1. **Deciding with Speed and Conviction** – leaders described as decisive were 12 times more likely to be high-performing. These leaders didn't wait for perfect information or become bottlenecks because of too much analysis or caution. This finding -- puzzling and counterintuitive to some -- is strongly corroborated by Zenger Folkman's research documented in their new book, *Speed: How Successful Leaders Accelerate Execution*(follow for a link to ZF's Pace Assessment) and webinar on *The Tango of Speed and Quality*.

2. **Engaging for Impact** – top performing leaders excel at getting buy-in from employees and other key stakeholders. They execute disciplined communications and influencing strategies. This doesn't mean being liked or avoiding painful decisions. Engagement included effective conflict management. 2/3 of CEOs who excelled at engagement were rated highly in conflict management. Researchers found that the leaders who made it to the CEOs office faster than average were strong at engaging in conflict.

3. **Adapting Proactively** – CEOs skilled at adapting were 6.7 times more likely to succeed. Highly adaptable leaders spent as much as 50% more time on a longer term focus. They plugged into broad information flows, networking, scanning diverse data sources, and looking for patterns in unrelated businesses. "As a result, they sense change earlier and make strategic moves to take advantage of it." Adaptable leaders also recognized that setbacks were an inevitable part of the development process. They didn't treat these as failures, but as learning opportunities. The CEOs who treated setbacks as failures were 50% less successful.

4. **Delivering Reliably** – leaders who scored high on reliability were 15 times more likely to succeed. "A stunning 94% of the strong CEO candidates we analyzed scored high on consistently following through on their commitments." Setting realistic expectations is key. And "most important, they surrounded themselves with strong teams." 60% of first-time CEOs made the mistake of not getting the right team in place fast enough. "The successful ones move decisively to upgrade talent."

This research doesn't describe outstanding leaders as having supernatural powers across all four skill sets. One or two areas were towering strengths that elevated their effectiveness to extraordinary levels. If one of these four skills are very weak, that can be a leadership flaw that drags everything down and is fatal to effectiveness. But most leaders don't have fatal flaws, just weaker areas. The pathway to higher performance isn't through improving weaknesses. Pre/post leadership assessments show that "**building leadership strengths is 2 – 3 times more effective than fixing weaknesses**".

So which of these skills could you turn into your super power? Which one is among your greatest strengths? Which one would have the most impact on your current or aspired role? And which skill are you most passionate about developing? Where your answer to those three questions intersect is where you'll find your **leadership development sweet spot** and route to higher performance.

The Unlikable Leader: 7 Ways to Improve Employee/Boss Relationships

Can a leader be highly effective (increase productivity, profitability, service/quality levels, boost safety, etc.) without being liked? Less effective leaders often think so. They might declare "it's not a popularity contest, I don't care if people like me; my job is to get results."

Unlikable leaders get results alright -- poor and unlikable results. Zenger Folkman's study of 360 assessments on over 50,000 leaders showed that the most **likable leaders, who also demanded high standards, strength goals, and continual improvement, produced results almost 9 times higher than the most unlikable leaders**.

So what does it take to become a more likable -- and more effective -- leader? Zenger Folkman looked at 360 assessment data from more than 51,000 leaders to identify seven key actions that substantially increase likability scores:

1. Increase positive emotional connections with others.
2. Display rock solid integrity.
3. Cooperate with others.
4. Be a coach, mentor and teacher.
5. Be an inspiration.
6. Be visionary and future focused.
7. Ask for feedback and make an effort to change.

Last month, Jack Zenger and Joe Folkman delivered a 45 minute webinar, **The Unlikable Leader: 7 Ways to Improve Employee/Boss Relationships** with practical developmental suggestions for each of the seven key actions. They also covered:

- The characteristics of an unlikable boss
- Can you be an effective leader if you're unlikable?
- Why being unlikable thwarts a leader's effectiveness
- How likability impacts employee engagement
- Whether men/women and supervisors/senior managers are more likable
- Do we become more likable as we age?

Click here to watch the archived webinar.

Contrary to what some leaders believe, it's nearly impossible to become an outstanding leader without being likable. Less likable (and less effective) leaders won't like to hear that.

View this webinar to learn the 7 key actions that our research shows will substantially increase your likability score!

Tweet Reading: Recommended Online Articles

This section summarizes last month's LinkedIn Updates and Twitter Tweets about online articles or blog posts that I've flagged as worth reading. These are usually posted on weekends when I am doing much of my reading for research, learning, or leisure. You can follow me on Twitter at **https://twitter.com/JimClemmer**

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

Practical development tips drawn from performance evaluations of 7,000 individual contributors and 5,000 managers.

> **"How to Improve at Work When You're Not Getting Feedback"** -- Jack Zenger and Joe Folkman
> **https://hbr.org**
> *"If you work for a boss who doesn't provide feedback, it's easy to feel rudderless. There were five behaviors that managers most often associated with high performance."*

An excellent summary of the vital "soft skills" of leading ourselves and others that produce hard results.

> **"What Makes a Great Leader?"** --Harvard Business Review
> **https://hbr.org**
> *"Emotional intelligence sets great leaders apart from the rest. Learn to recognize it in yourself and others with this 7-minute video slide deck."*

Do you believe a leader's role is to give corrective feedback and assume positive feedback isn't needed/useful?

> **"Why Do So Many Managers Avoid Giving Praise?"** -- Jack Zenger and Joe Folkman
> **https://hbr.org**
> *"Giving only negative feedback diminishes a leader's effectiveness in the eyes of others and does not have the effect they believe it has."*

Research with over 50,000 leaders shows a very strong correlation between effective leaders and likability.

> **"Are You An Unlikable Leader? 3 Ways To Improve Your Relationships"** -- Jack Zenger
> **www.forbes.com**
> *"90% of leaders will be more effective if they can do something to improve their likability. This is because leadership is a process of influence."*

Read *The Leader Letter* in Weekly Installments

The **items in each month's issue of** *The Leader Letter* **are first published in my weekly** blog **during the previous month.**

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

Feedback and Follow-Up

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

May the Force (of strengths) be with you!

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