

Jim Clemmer's Leader Letter



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MARCH 2011, ISSUE 96

Having just returned last weekend from three weeks of midsummer heat in Australia to the continuing deep freeze of winter in Canada, I am especially mindful of changing seasons. March is the month of the spring equinox. At this time of year day and night are roughly 12 hours each and the sun is at the midpoint in the sky.



Universum - C. Flammarion: Heikenwaelder Hugo, Wien 1998

In my favorite of his books, *Great Expectations*, Charles Dickens descriptively writes (as he so often does), **"it was one of those March days when the sun shines hot and the wind blows cold: when it is summer in the light, and winter in the shade."** While here in Canada Mother Nature can throw winter at us one day and spring the next, we can also choose where we stand; in the sun or in the shade. **Do we look for strengths or weaknesses?** Do we build on successes or dwell on failures? **Do we lead**, coach, and develop people to grow their potential **or do we manage** (often micromanage) their performance and keep them in the cold and shade?

Prior to Heather joining me for a wonderful two week vacation in Australia, I spent a busy week in February working with senior and middle management teams in the [engineering and maintenance division at QANTAS Airways](#) in and around their headquarters in Sydney. Under the theme of "LEADERSHIFT: Living the Brand" this division is very effectively refocusing and re-growing their service and support for the company's rebranding work. This is being done with extensive leadership and culture development work around continuous service quality improvement. The whole effort is well planned, designed, and executed. **It is an excellent example of building on the company's long success and strengths to fly high on the winds of change** tossing around many airlines around the world.

This month we deal with our **choices in listening to the voice of our customers** (ideally before we have a riot on our hands), persuading and influencing, limiting our possibilities, leading @ the speed of change, and developing "soft skills" like coaching. I hope you find this issue helps you to "March" into this month with **inspiration, ideas, and practical approaches to warm yourself and others in the light of leadership!**

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www.jimclemmer.com

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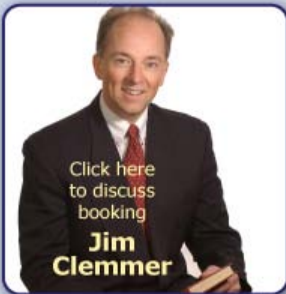
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THE OP RIOTS: NOW THERE'S THE VOICE OF THE CUSTOMER!

We can gain **great perspective and leadership lessons from looking back at how previous generations handled the sweeping changes and crisis of their day.** I've been in London, England three times over the last few months, working with an international executive team based there. As a classical art and history buff I added some extra time before and after each visit to browse a few of London's wonderful galleries and museums (having been in the city a few times over the years.)



On my first visit of the three trips I checked out the [V & A \(Victoria and Albert Museum\)](#). I fell in love with the place and went back about half a dozen times over the next few months. If you haven't been and want to check it out they have a good web site. But [Wikipedia's entry](#) is much more extensive and gives a great overview of the massive facility. It's the world's largest museum of decorative arts and design with a permanent collection of 4.5 million objects in 145 galleries over 12.5 acres. I stepped foot into each gallery, but only really studied a tiny fraction of what's there. That leaves lots more to look forward to on future trips!

The V & A Theatre and Performance gallery holds the UK's national collection of material on live performance from Shakespeare's time to today. While browsing there, I came across a short reference to "**The Old Price Riots**" in the early 1800s that **provided some very clear customer feedback** on The New Covent Garden! I was intrigued and had to do more research when I got home.

"The OP Riots" occurred when ticket prices were raised slightly for the New Covent Garden after rebuilding from a fire that destroyed the old building. **Customers also objected to the new architecture** and – in the religious and nationalist prejudice of the times – to the hiring of an Italian opera singer married to a Frenchman. Covent Garden was hemorrhaging money as **protestors arrived late to pay for half-price tickets and then staged mass protests inside the theatre.** They wore OP hats, had OP songs and dance, raised OP placards, and circulated satirical OP handbills!

Incredibly **stage performances carried on during the riots** – and continued for **sixty-seven days!!** The protestors won in the end. The old prices were restored. They even had an OP banquet with Covent Garden management to celebrate!

Rioting customers put a **whole different slant on "the voice of the customer."** Sixty-seven days of riotous feedback is pretty hard to ignore! **Today's customers (internal or external) are much less vocal -- to you.** Today's customers **protest poor service levels by bad mouthing you to dozens -- or with social media, websites, and protest songs that can go viral -- to thousands or even millions of your customers.** The best service providers **tap into that dissatisfaction before it gets out of control.** **How well are you listening to your customers?**

Further Reading:

You can read an outline (with illustrations) of [The OP Riots](#) on Stanford University's web site.

PERSUASION AND INFLUENCE: STORYTELLING SKILLS ARE ESSENTIAL

Catching up on my reading I recently came across a pair of *Fortune* articles on the **vital importance of storytelling for leaders**. Management often relies on directing, telling, and bossing – even if politely saying "please." Leadership seeks to influence thinking and behaviors.



We've all found ourselves resisting someone else, not because of what they are saying, but how **they are saying it**. They may strike us as arrogant, unfeeling, rude, or overly critical. Most of the friction in our relationships comes from the wrong tone of voice. Less effective bosses or managers use position power and get people to do things because they have to. **Leaders get people to do the same things because people want to**. It's the same goal, but with a world of difference in execution and long-term results.

Since humans first gathered with their tribe around a fire, we've deeply craved stories to entertain, instruct, warn, reinforce, or influence. Books, movies, news media, music, social networks, family gatherings, and coffee chats, serve up a wide variety of stories. In today's workplaces people want **less data** and information dumps – "**headspeak**" – and **more imagery**, metaphors, and stories – "**heartspeak**."

Appropriately, [Storytelling Lessons from Company Frontlines](#), uses a few stories to illustrate leadership lessons on stories having a purpose, creating pride and hope, and building trust. [How Storytelling Spurs Success](#) has a few more leadership stories and is especially helpful with practical points on selling your story and what to avoid.

Further Reading:

- [Thoughts That Make You Go Hmmm...on Stories, Mythology, and Metaphors](#)
- [Thoughts That Make You Go Hmmm...on Harnessing the Timeless Power of Stories](#)
- A section of brief articles on [Communicating, Motivating, and Influencing](#)
- [Information versus Communication](#)

SNAPPY VIDEO SHOWS HOW WE LIMIT OUR POSSIBILITIES

I've long been an avid collector of "famous last words." These are pronouncements by experts confidently projecting today's current limitations into tomorrow. These serve as **stark reminders to be very careful about getting stuck in ruts of certainty** as seeing the world only as it is.



Here are a few favorite examples:

"There is not the slightest indication that nuclear energy will ever be obtainable. It would mean that the atom would have to be shattered at will."

- Albert Einstein, 1932

"A man has been arrested in New York for attempting to extort funds from ignorant and superstitious people by exhibiting a device which he says will convey the human voice any distance over metallic wires so that it will be heard by the listener at the other end. He calls this instrument a telephone. Well-informed people know that it is impossible to transmit the human voice over wires."

- News item in an 1868 New York paper

"There will never be a bigger plane built."

- Boeing engineer after the first flight of the 247 a twin engine plane that carried ten people.

"Radio has no future. Heavier-than-air flying machines are impossible. X-rays will prove to be a hoax."

- William Thomson, Lord Kelvin English scientist, 1899 -- VARIOUS

I recently came across a catchy video produced by Red Hat, the open source Linux software company. [Truth Happens](#) illustrates a few "famous last words" in a fast paced, high-energy three minute video. I am using it in [leadership workshops](#) and [Management Team Retreats](#) to help participants remove blinders and limited thinking. **Leadership means being open to possibilities and imagining what could be.**

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.

It's an obvious leadership approach that isn't so obvious for many organizations. Retaining top people is becoming a critical issue.

[To keep employees loyal, try asking what they want](#) – Fortune blog

"Somewhere between 30% and 80% of all employees -- depending on which poll you believe - are itching to work elsewhere, as soon as they get a better offer."

Unlike many discussions of generational differences, this blog post offers practical advice followed by online comments and debate.

[Managing and Motivating Employees in Their Twenties](#) - Michael Fertik <http://blogs.hbr.org>

"Younger people are especially hungry both to learn and to receive affirmation that they are doing a good job. The best ones are generally much more motivated by incremental education and acknowledgement than they are by a modest bump in salary."

GROWING AND DEVELOPING PEOPLE IS URGENT

I recently had a career discussion with a sharp and ambitious young family friend who has been working for five years for a large multinational company. In his late twenties, he's now finishing up his MBA and **looking for more growth and development than his company is currently providing**. High potential young professionals like him have been keeping their heads down as his company's industry went through tough times in 2009/10 and he was happy to just hang on to his job.



But that's **shifting very quickly**. Surveys are showing that, like our young friend, **many more people are looking for new opportunities in 2011**. The large corporation he works for is back in growth mode. But having done some training, facilitating, and consulting in his company, it's very conservative, slow moving, and filled with **strong technical managers who are quite weak in people development**.

As economies pick up steam and revenues grow, **key elements of leadership** such as engagement and involvement, reward and recognition, coaching, and performance management are **rapidly shifting from important to critical**. An excellent *Harvard Business Review* blog entitled "[When to Reward Employees with More Responsibility and Money](#)" provides excellent tips and techniques for this vital leadership skill. As Susan David, Director of the Harvard/McLean Institute of Coaching and Founding Director of Evidence Based Psychology points out, "many organizations lose some of their best operational people because of creating single pathways to organizational success. Organizations who create multiple, flexible pathways to success will keep their best people, keep them engaged, and keep them for longer."

"[When to Reward Employees](#)" provides good advice, two case studies, and these practical tips:

Do:

- Make sure your people are working at the edge of their abilities
- Create an assignment that helps you assess whether the employee will excel in a new role
- Find other ways to motivate your people – beyond raises and promotions

Don't:

- Say no to a request for a raise or promotion without a clear explanation
- Rely solely on your assessment of the employee's performance -- ask others for input
- Assume that a promotion will make the employee happy -- look for a fit with the person's interests and abilities

Our young friend's boss isn't staying on top of the changing job landscape and paying attention to **increasingly critical leadership approaches like these**. That ripples right up through that company; **the boss isn't being nurtured and developed by his senior managers**. Knowing some of those players, they'd say now that they're out of the crunch and getting really busy, and that they don't have the time for leadership development. But somehow they'll find the time to replace and retrain a new employee when our young friend leaves.

Further Reading:

A selection of articles on **Leading Others**: [Growing and Developing](#)

MORE EVIDENCE THAT SOFT SKILLS PRODUCE HARD RESULTS

How frequently and effectively do you recognize, engage, and coach the people you lead? Are these strengths or weaknesses? How do you know? What's your awareness of your self-awareness?



As organizations rebound and rebuild for the coming years, these **"soft skills" are key to higher performance.** A Towers Watson study entitled, [Perspectives: Turbocharging Employee Engagement – The Power of Recognition from Managers](#) found, "companies with a highly engaged employee population reported significantly better financial performance (a 5.75% difference in operating margins and a 3.44% difference in net profit margins) than did low-engagement workplaces." They also found that companies with **higher engagement levels** "produced returns 9.3% higher than the returns for the S&P 500 Index."

Towers Watson found that **key elements of engagement are caring leaders, development opportunities, and feelings of empowerment or ability to control one's own work.** The role of **recognition was an especially striking finding** in their study: "strong manager performance in recognizing employee performance increases engagement by almost 60%." There's a good hard result from a soft skill.

Their Global Recognition Study found three keys for managers:

- **Engage in Candid Conversations** – personal, not just information, and listening to opinions and concerns.
- **Define Clear and Relevant Performance Targets** – focus on top goals, break down objectives, and clarify responsibilities.
- **Hold People Accountable for Their Results** – evaluate performance accurately and address low performance effectively.

The dilemma is that too often average or low performing managers think they're doing a much better job than others feel they are. And it's their **lack of self-awareness that both causes and covers up the problem.** In ["Soft Skills Boost the Bottom Line"](#), Green Peak Partners and Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations report, "self-aware leaders who possess strong interpersonal skills deliver better financial performance." They found, "executives whose interpersonal skill scores were low scored badly on every single performance dimension. **A high self-awareness score was the strongest predictor of overall success...**executives who are conscious of their own weaknesses are often better able to hire subordinates who perform well in areas in which the leader lacks acumen."

This is consistent with the growing body of research on Emotional Intelligence. **Self-awareness is the foundation upon which the other personal development habits and interpersonal skills are built.** So how are you doing? How do you know?

PUBLIC WORKSHOP: LEADING @ THE SPEED OF CHANGE JUNE 14 - 15

Join me in Kitchener June 14-15 for a rare public workshop! **Leading @ the Speed of Change** is a very special two-day workshop designed to help individuals and teams develop strong and effective leadership skills with practical and concrete leadership actions you can apply immediately, and strategies that work.



[Special Discounts:](#) It's a powerful session for individuals, but the **benefits are magnified when a team attends together**. We're offering **deep discounts for teams, and early registration**. You can find full [details, discounts, and registration](#) here. [Register today!](#)

FIVE COMMON PITFALLS AND TRAPS TO COACHING AND DEVELOPING

Whether it's to **increase service/quality levels, boost engagement and morale, strengthen teamwork, or improve safety**, we're working with many organizations to **strengthen coaching and developing skills across the organization**. Through this work we run into some or many of these pitfalls and traps:

Confusing "What" and "How" - this comes from confusing inspiration and knowledge with skills. Even if supervisors, managers, and executives want to provide better coaching and know what it looks like, it doesn't mean they can deliver it. **Skill building demands a development process that provides how-to steps and relevant models** or examples with plenty of practice and feedback.

The Experience Assumption - too often it's assumed that people in leadership roles have coaching skills simply because they have managerial experience. Using ineffective approaches many times doesn't lead to higher skill. As the legendary Green Bay Packers coach Vince Lombardi once said, "Practice does not make perfect. Only perfect practice makes perfect." **Are you and your managers practicing the right things?**

Lack of Alignment - moving an organization's management from 'cops' to 'coaches' starts with training. However, it has to go much further than that. Management systems and processes, reward and recognition, team engagement activities, as well as management standards and measurements have to **reflect and support management's vital coaching role**.

Failing to Coach the Coaches - research overwhelmingly shows that not following through with on-the-job coaching after skill-development sessions can result in **failure rates as high as 87 percent** in applying the new skills to the job. So who's coaching your front-line coaches? If you don't train, hold accountable, and reinforce your executives and managers to provide this crucial support, only a small amount of your development investments will take. The quality and "stickiness" of coaching and developing efforts are only as strong as your executive-to-supervisory coaching chain.

Executives Not Leading by Example - this is the single biggest reason coaching skills are not developed throughout an organization. **Ensure that your executives practice the coaching skills preached by your development program**. Supervisors and managers will imitate those at the top. If merely paying lip service to coaching skills got an executive to the top, why would his or her management staff give it much more attention? If executives are "too busy" to participate in developing their coaching skills, don't waste everyone else's time.

In their book, *Follow This Path: How the World's Greatest Organizations Drive Growth by Unleashing Human Potential*, Curt Coffman and Gabriel Gonzalez-Molina write, "Managers' chief responsibility lies in helping employees on their team unleash their human potential. No systems, process, or self-directed team – irrespective of how modern, fashionable, or flawless it may be – can ever take the place of a great manager. That's because great managers act as the emotional connection between employees and the organizations they work for. In effect, they act as the emotional engineers who set the reactions in place and watch them take effect."

THOUGHTS THAT MAKE YOU GO HMMM ON... COACHING AND DEVELOPMENT

"Coaching is the process of enabling others to act, of building on their strengths. ... To coach is to facilitate, which literally means 'to make easy' -- not less demanding, less exciting or less intense, but less discouraging, less bound up with excessive controls. ... Coaching is face-to-face leadership that pulls together people... encourages them to step up to responsibility and continued achievement, and treats them as full-scale partners and contributors. ... Every coach, at every level, is above all a value-shaper."

- Nancy Austin and Tom Peters, *A Passion for Excellence*

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

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

"Outstanding leaders go out of their way to boost the self-esteem of their personnel. If people believe in themselves, it's amazing what they can accomplish."

- Sam Walton, Wal-Mart founder

"In our latest meta-analysis of 198,000 employees in almost eight thousand business units, employees who strongly agreed that they had a chance to do what they do best every day claimed fewer sick days, filed fewer workers' compensation claims, and had fewer accidents while on the job....Great managers would offer you this advice: Focus on each person's strengths and manage around his weaknesses. Don't try to fix the weaknesses. Don't try to perfect each person. Instead do everything you can to help each person cultivate his talents. Help each person become more of who he already is."

- Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman, *First, Break All The Rules: What The World's Greatest Managers Do Differently*

"Easing someone's path does not mean simply providing the path of least resistance. Sometimes the best way to help people is to hold them responsible; accepting no excuses can sometimes be the best kind of aid we can offer."

- William J Bennett, *The Moral Compass: Stories for a Life's Journey*

"The Ken Blanchard Companies asked 1,400 workers about some of the biggest mistakes leaders make when it comes to managing others. The responses cited most often were:

- 1. Failing to provide appropriate feedback (82%)**
- 2. Failing to listen to or involve others in the process (81%)**
- 3. Failing to use a leadership style that is appropriate to the person, task, and situation (76%)**
- 4. Failing to set clear goals and objectives (76%)**
- 5. Failing to train and develop their people (59%)"**

- Ken Blanchard, *The Changing Face of Leadership: 4 Keys to Managing Today's Workforce*

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.

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

Jim



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