

THE LEADER LETTER

Leading with *STRENGTH*

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Past Issues

Practical Leadership Blog

In this issue...

March 2014, Issue 132

[Archived Webinar on Building Leadership Skills and a Coaching Culture](#)

[Talent Management: Developing Strengths of Individual Contributors](#)

[Review of One Simple Idea: How Positive Thinking Reshaped Modern Life by Mitch Horowitz](#)

[Thoughts That Make You Go Hmm on... One Simple Idea by Mitch Horowitz](#)

[Leadership Excellence and 2014 Top Training Companies](#)

[Coaching Matters: Five Steps, Webinars, Symposium, and Briefing](#)

[Archived Webinar: FEEDBACK – You Need it, Your Employees Want to Hear it!](#)

[Tweet Reading: Recommended Online Resources](#)

[Read *The Leader Letter* in Twice Weekly Installments](#)

[Feedback and Follow-Up](#)

MARCH 2014, ISSUE 132

A reader sent me this e-mail:

"Your recent blog, [A Dose of Reality: Our World is Dramatically Better](#), is excellent. Your information supports what I had already believed but did not have data to support.



As I was reading your blog, I happened to have on my desk a copy of the book "The Trouble with Billionaires" by Linda McQuaig and Neil Brooks. They have a very contrary opinion, believing that things are getting worse and the large number of billionaires is contributing, if not causing a worsening of the situation for the poor. They provide references for almost all of their claims. I looked further into some of their statistics and info and found some classic misrepresentation of info.

We do focus way too much on what's wrong and not on all that's right with our world. If only we could forget our troubles as half as easily as we overlook our blessings!

Of course, stats are often manipulated, overblown, or overlooked to prove our case. I am not familiar with this book. It sounds like a classic case of putting on pessimistic glasses. When I was working on my last book, [Growing @ the Speed of Change](#), I wrote this blog item with that citation; "[Range of Reality: Choosing the Best or The Worst of Times](#)". It sure sounds like McQuaig and Brooks have chosen to wear dark and pessimistic glasses.

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This issue publishes my February [blog posts](#). You'll find my review and excerpts from *One Simple Idea* by Mitch Horowitz chronicles one of the most radical ideas of the last few centuries; our thoughts shape our world. The glasses we choose to wear tint our reality.

Another key choice that shapes reality is whether to focus on building strengths or fixing weaknesses. Feedback and coaching helps make those vital decisions. This issue has links to three archived webinars and related columns and articles on these topics.

I am not an optometrist -- but do work to be an optimist. I hope this issue helps you to check your vision!

ARCHIVED WEBINAR ON BUILDING LEADERSHIP SKILLS AND A COACHING CULTURE

Would you like to move beyond building individual leaders to building a culture of exceptional leadership and coaching in your organization? Are you concerned about succession planning, deepening leadership bench strength, cultivating teamwork, recruiting top talent, increasing retention and engagement, improving customer service, safety and wellness, and increasing sales and profits?



These critical issues are keeping many senior leaders, learning and development professionals, HR executives and organization development/effectiveness professionals up at night. But there's a confusing and contradictory array of programs and approaches promising solutions to these vital challenges.

On February 27 I delivered a 60 minute complimentary (no charge) webinar on [Building Leadership Skills and a Coaching Culture](#). I summarized Zenger Folkman's research on 5 keys to using a highly proven strengths-based leadership approach. I also overviewed an evidence-based approach to 6 keys to building a coaching culture with exceptional leaders. As you've been reading in my blogs, Zenger Folkman's deep research cuts through the dizzying clamor of leadership and coaching development claims, models, and approaches to what really works.

Watch the webinar to hear:

- Why traditional assessments, performance management, and training needs analysis that look for gaps and "improvement areas" don't work.

- How a scientific approach to strengths-based leadership development is 2 – 3 times more effective.
- Why many 360 feedback assessments are negative experiences that foster feedback phobia and reduce motivation for leadership skill development.
- Keys to building a positive can-do culture.
- The research on cross-training that provides new methodologies for building leadership strengths.
- The huge impact of coaching on engagement, extra effort, turnover, customer service, productivity, and organizational results.
- Common coaching traps that have created a vast coaching skills gap.
- A 4 step coaching framework to guide productive coaching conversations.

You can bring your team together to tune into the webinar. [Click here](#) to access it.

TALENT MANAGEMENT: DEVELOPING STRENGTHS OF INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTORS

The Sochi Olympics showed the colossal impact of key individuals on team success or a country's medal count. Popular entertainers or professional athletes are glaring examples of the outsize impact that key individuals have on the success of a movie or sports franchise.



Organizational success often hinges on oversized contributions from pivotal players like software developers, engineers, geologists, salespeople, physicians, marketers, designers, product developers, technicians, professors, and other specialists. Too often these key contributors are not included in leadership development efforts. Yet their contribution soars or sinks on their ability to focus on results, lead change, their interpersonal skills, or personal capabilities.

In today's hyper changing world, leadership needs to be seen as actions or behaviors, not positions or roles. We need everyone to act like leaders. We especially need our key individual contributors to become extraordinary leaders.

In Jack Zenger and Joe Folkman's *Harvard Business Review* blog, "[Develop the Leaders You've Been Overlooking](#)", they expand on these key reasons for investing in this vital group:

- Investing in their leadership development will make these valuable people *feel* highly valued.

- Talented individuals are more inclined to stay with organizations when they feel they are progressing.
- They will enjoy increased success.
- Some of them could well develop into excellent managers.

So is the process for developing individual contributors different from developing people in management roles? Chapter Eleven of [How to Be Exceptional: Drive Leadership Success by Magnifying Your Strengths](#), outlines Zenger Folkman's research showing the short answer is no. You can read more about this in a white paper excerpted from the book, "[Individual Contributors: Building on Strengths is the Foundation of Success at Every Level](#)." The approach involves:

- *Assessing the individual's competencies to identify their strengths and potential fatal flaws*
- *Identifying high-impact strengths to build (or fatal flaws to first fix)*
- *Using a traditional linear approach to fixing any fatal flaws*
- *Using a nonlinear approach to building the selected strengths*

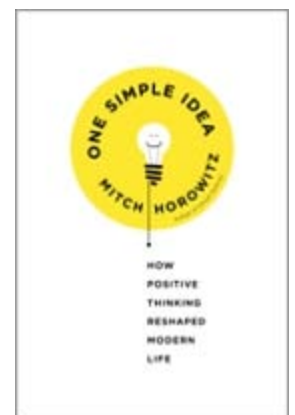
[Download the paper](#) to see the 16 competencies that best differentiate the most effective from the least effective contributors.

I gave an overview of these competencies and development approach during our complimentary February 27 webcast "Building Leadership Skills and a Coaching Culture." [Click here](#) to access it.

REVIEW OF ONE SIMPLE IDEA: HOW POSITIVE THINKING RESHAPED MODERN LIFE BY MITCH HOROWITZ

I couldn't put down this deeply researched, well-written, and fascinating book. His one simple idea is "thoughts are causative." Starting in the 1830s, Horowitz weaves together an entertaining and insightful history of "the most radical idea of our times."

As a long time student of self-help and personal growth literature and approaches I had many "aha" moments as I read *One Simple Idea*. Understanding the origins of "the law of attraction," visualization, affirmations, the placebo effect, 12 step recovery movements, self-hypnosis, breaking or forming habits, prosperity consciousness, "follow your bliss," spiritual enlightenment, and mind-body healing brought a whole new appreciation and understanding.



Horowitz traces the foundation for these approaches to the radical New Thought movement of the late 1800s. The term originated with Ralph Waldo Emerson's lecture "Success" published in 1870, "to redeem defeat by new thought." In 1899 "New Thought Conventions" were held in Hartford, CT and Boston. As Horowitz explains "the term New Thought encompassed the mind-power culture's highest aims: The ascension of man through his thoughts."

Horowitz identifies and defines "four primary schools of positive thinking:"

1. The Magical Thinking or Divine Thought School
2. The Conditioning or Reprogramming School
3. The Conversion School
4. The Meaning-Based School

I agree with Horowitz that positive thinking is both the most influential and the most maligned philosophy in North America. It's been satirized with skits on Saturday Night Live and often dismissed as glossing over real world problems with Pollyanna bromides and inspirational fridge-magnet quotations.

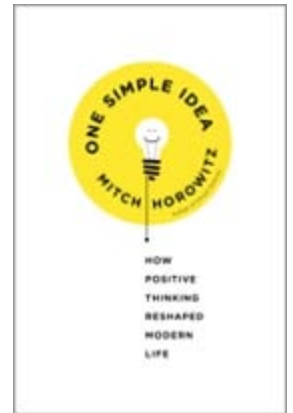
In the book's last chapter "Does it Work," Horowitz dips into a tiny sample of the scientific evidence for the power of thoughts to shape our world from research in quantum physics and medicine. And he rightly points to the serious philosophical shortcoming of positive thinking approaches like "the law of attraction" as THE universal law claiming that we alone create all that happens to us. There's growing proof that the mind does have a huge impact on the reality of our lives. But it's one of many forces in the universe.

My biggest disappointment with *One Simple Idea* was not including the deep science emerging from cognitive and Positive Psychology. In the past 30 years this rapidly growing field has put together a large and growing body of evidence and proven methodologies around using our thoughts to reshape our world.

Go to www.mitchhorowitz.com and watch his five minute "book trailer" video "One Simple Idea: A Short History of Positive Thinking." His *Huffington Post* blog on "[The 7 Biggest Myths of Positive Thinking](#)" is also worth a read. You can read my writing on the topic of "Attitude and Outlook" at [blog posts](#) and my [book excerpts/articles](#).

THOUGHTS THAT MAKE YOU GO HMM ON... ONE SIMPLE IDEA BY MITCH HOROWITZ

"For all its shortcomings, positive thinking has stood up with surprising muscularity in the present era of placebo studies, mind-body therapies, brain-biology research, and, most controversial, the findings of quantum physics experiments ... may challenge how we come to view ourselves in the twenty-first century, at least as much as Darwinism challenged man's self-perception in the Victorian age."



"I raked up certain old griefs out of the ashes of the past, borrowed some new troubles out of the future and put them all under the powerful microscope of a morbid imagination, which magnifies the awful about a thousand times, and diminishes the cheerful."

- quoting Prentice Mulford an 1880s author who began the modern positive thinking movement's transition to a philosophy of personal success

"The mind is a magnet. It has the power, first of attracting thought, and next of sending that thought out again ... What kind of thought you most charge that magnet (your mind) with, or set it open to receive, it will attract most of that kind to you."

- Prentice Mulford's 1886 Law of Success

"Within the parameters of physical possibilities, you receive what you 'want with your whole soul' -- whether inner truth, a personal accomplishment, relationships, whatever it is. Excluding some great countervailing force, and for either ill or good, the one thing that you want above all else is what you get."

"The wish to authentically search for the self and its true aims is, perhaps, the greatest form of mental affirmation to which a person can aspire, and the one that brings the most help."

"Some medical authorities might privately nod in sympathy with the defense of Mesmer by Charles d'Eslon, the late-eighteenth-century Paris physician: 'It may indeed be entirely imagination. And if it is? Then imagination is a force as potent as it is little understood. Let us work with this mysterious imagination, let us use it to cure, let us learn more about it.'"

"The time has come for science to confront serious implications of the fact that directed, willed mental activity can clearly and systematically alter brain function; that the exertion of willful effort generates a physical force that has the power to change how the brain works and even its physical structure."

- Jeffrey M. Schwartz, M.D, UCLA and author of *The Mind and the Brain*

LEADERSHIP EXCELLENCE AND 2014 TOP TRAINING COMPANIES

Zenger Folkman has just received a 2014 Top 20 Leadership Training Companies Award from TrainingIndustry.com.



Selection for this year's Top 20 Leadership Training Companies was based on the following criteria:

- Thought leadership and influence on the leadership training industry
- Industry recognition and innovation
- Breadth of programs and audiences served
- Delivery methods offered
- Company size and growth potential
- Strength of clients
- Geographic reach
- Experience in serving the market

[Click here](#) to read more about the award and why Zenger Folkman was included in this small and select group. This award publicly recognizes what we've been seeing for the past 18 months of our strategic partnership with Zenger Folkman. We continue to be delighted to work with such a leading edge, research-based, and results-driven company.

Since purchasing the excellence series of newsletters, HR.com has been dramatically expanding the publications to cover a wide range of HR-related issues. You can see the full range of existing and newly launched e-newsletters at <http://www.hr.com/en/magazines>. There's no charge for any of the publications.

The February issue of Leadership Excellence Essentials is available at http://www.hr.com/en/magazines/leadership_excellence_essentials. The cover feature is on the appointment of Mary Barra as CEO of GM. Moving from HR to CEO of a major company like GM is rare. The story focuses on how strategic thinking and culture development were key to

this promotion. Some other articles in this issue focus on learning agility, agile organizations, why many change methodologies often fail, the art of mentoring, and building a culture of accountability.

My white paper, [Leadership Competency Models: Why Many Are Failing and How to Make Them Flourish](#), has also been condensed in this issue. We continue to encounter many organizations having problems using this leadership development approach. Like many powerful tools, the success of using a leadership competency model depends on how it's used.

COACHING MATTERS: FIVE STEPS, WEBINARS, SYMPOSIUM, AND BRIEFING

Having someone fix our turned up collar or point out we have a piece of spinach in our teeth before a big presentation can be very helpful. The tone and intention of this feedback makes us feel supported and thankful or belittled and resentful.



Giving difficult feedback is a critical coaching skill. As reported in ["Here's the Feedback on Giving and Getting Feedback"](#) our survey showed that many people avoid giving negative feedback. Our study also showed that most people want to get negative feedback. BUT 92% of respondents reported that how corrective or redirecting feedback is delivered determined whether it was seen as helpful or hurtful.

Continuing this discussion, Jack Zenger's latest *Forbes* column, ["Just Tell Me! 5 Strategies for Giving Difficult Feedback"](#), provides practical approaches for each of these 5 steps:

1. Immediately play the background music
2. Make and follow a plan
3. Don't tackle multiple topics in one discussion
4. Rehearse any serious discussion
5. Treat the receiver with an extra measure of respect

Skill building in guiding coaching conversations and giving difficult feedback is a key focus of Zenger Folkman's March 12 and 13 Coaching Symposium in Orlando, Florida. See [You're Invited to Join Our Rare Coaching Symposium](#) for more information and links to register.

Jack Zenger's January webinar on Coaching Matters! is now available for viewing. In this 40 minute presentation Jack overviews the key research underlying ZF's development of [The Extraordinary Coach](#) and surveys the webinar audience on their current coaching practices. [Click here](#) to view the webinar.

On February 27 I delivered a complimentary webcast on 6 keys to building a coaching culture with exceptional leaders along with 5 keys to strengths-based leadership development. [Click here](#) to access it.

The morning of April 3 I'll expand both these topic areas with a complimentary executive briefing in Mississauga. Click [Vital Steps for Leadership and Coaching Skills Development](#) for more information and to register.

ARCHIVED WEBINAR: FEEDBACK – YOU NEED IT, YOUR EMPLOYEES WANT TO HEAR IT!

We are often asked, "What is the one thing a person ought to do to be a better leader and have a more successful career?"



While it is difficult to narrow down the list to just one thing, there is one that seems to surface over and over again in Zenger Folkman's research. That one thing is having the ability to ask for and respond to feedback from others. When we look at 360 survey data we can see an absolute correlation between the ability to ask for feedback and the overall effectiveness of leaders.

In a new study ZF has been conducting, we have also discovered that employees want feedback. Positive feedback is welcome -- but they also want the negative or corrective feedback most leaders are hesitant to give. Employees want it, leaders hate to give it.

In February Jack Zenger and Joe Folkman explored this fascinating topic. They shared new research about both asking for, and giving feedback, and showed how to get better at doing both!

Unequivocally, the ability to GIVE feedback and the ability to RECEIVE feedback are essential to being an effective leader today.

How Good Are You at Getting and Giving Feedback? Knowing that it's important to give and receive feedback is one thing. Knowing whether you do it well is another. Webinar attendees received access to our complimentary [Feedback Self-Assessment](#). [Click here](#) to access the archived webinar.

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:

We need to fix a fatal flaw first. But most leaders don't have any and are better off building their strengths from good to great.

["In 2014 Are You Fixing Your Weakness, Or Building Your Strength? Here's What Matters Most"](#) --Joseph Folkman
<http://www.forbes.com>

"Most employees and leaders are disturbingly preoccupied with fixing what's wrong. In our research we have found that 70-80% of leaders and employees will benefit more by improving what they are doing right."

An insightful look at Netflix's talent management values/culture to attract, retain, and manage stellar employees

Netflix Culture: Freedom & Responsibility -- Slideshare --
[Play Slides](#)
<http://www.slideshare.net/>

A personal CEO experience on the power of balancing management (systems/processes) with leadership (people/emotions).

["Lead from the Heart"](#) -- Gail McGovern, *Harvard Business Review*
<http://hbr.org/>

"Your job as a leader is to tap into the power of that higher purpose -- and you can't do it by retreating to the analytical. If you want to lead, have the courage to do it from the heart."

Quick and practical steps for dealing with today's crazy-busy world where time and priority management has never been more critical.

["6 Ways To Maximize Short Work Interactions"](#) -- Jack Zenger

www.forbes.com

"The life for a manager inside an organization has an unrelenting pace, with very few occasions where there is uninterrupted time. As a result, relationship building and development opportunities may fall by the wayside."

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@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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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
<http://www.clemmergroup.com>