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A sign in a diner read, "Customers who feel our servers are rude should see the manager." How true. Servers often reflect the level of service they are getting from their leaders. Rude or insensitive managers create that culture. As a customer, I'd rather not find out just how rude the manager is!

Many organizations have a set of core values defining their ideal culture. But too often there's a big gap between *aspired values* and *lived values* -- what frontline team members experience every day. That gap can be traced directly back to the department, division, or organization's leaders.



This is an enduring and vital key to culture development. For example, engineer Joseph Juran was an earlier pioneer in quality improvement in Japan and North America. He's one of the key figures in the revolutionary quality and process improvement techniques that have evolved into today's Lean approaches. Juran wrote "having observed a great many companies in action, I am unable to point to a single instance in which stunning results were achieved without the active and personal leadership of upper managers... In a revolutionary change - a change in culture -- leadership is not delegable." Another quality guru, W. Edwards Deming agrees, "The transformation must be led by top management."

In his book, *The Culture Cycle: How to Shape the Unseen Force that Transforms Performance* Harvard professor James Heskett reports on his decades of research on leadership and culture change. He makes this critical point, "effective leadership often involves delegating responsibilities and authority. But one responsibility that can't be delegated completely is reshaping and maintaining an effective culture."

Zenger Folkman looked at ratings from 34,098 employees on whether their immediate manager was a role model. In looking at their level of commitment/engagement they found that poor role model managers had employees at only 41 percent commitment levels. Positive role models managers had employees with 88 percent commitment levels. Of course, less committed or engaged employees create lower levels of service, quality, innovation, safety, and productivity.

This issue focuses on a few aspects of leadership team effectiveness and culture development. You can check your leadership team on our list of seven common traps that snare many teams. You'll also find a number of ways leadership teams can model the culture they're trying to build. As well, you can see how performance management approaches are changing to better reflect strengths-focused and positive cultures.

To paraphrase an old adage, the road to a weak culture is paved with good intentions. We often judge ourselves by our intentions or aspired values. But our teams follow our actions or the values we live each day. They see their leaders loud and clear.

Is Your Leadership Team Slipping into These Traps?

Check all that apply:

- Speed Traps and Tyranny of the Urgent** – flooded by e-mails, endless meetings, and crisis management our team is often reactive and loses sight of the big picture.
- Partial and Piecemeal Programs** – leadership development, succession planning, customer service, lean, safety, talent/performance management, IT systems, executive coaching, are separate programs not well linked together.
- Leadership Lip Service** – leadership team members send contradictory messages about our core values and desired culture through inconsistent behaviors.
- Not Building Change Capacity** – our change and development efforts don't engage the hearts and heads of key leaders and frontline staff and don't energize and equip them to make it happen.
- Teams Not Pulling Together** – strong leaders drive change in their "silo" and work at cross-purposes. This weakens the team and our culture development efforts.
- Communication Breakdowns** – leadership teams aren't united in strategic priorities, key messages, behaviors that model our vision and values, and rigorous implementation planning.
- Failing to Follow Through** – strategies and development plans often lose focus because we don't have a robust implementation process engaging key teams with a disciplined follow through process.



An organization's culture ripples out from the team leading it. When leadership teams slide into these traps, their culture is weakened. It's one of the main reasons for the high failure rate of efforts to improve customer service, quality, safety, innovation, employee engagement, retain top talent, or introduce new technologies.

Recently I delivered a webinar on ***Executive Team Building and Culture Development***. This 60-minute session started with a deeper look at these traps. We then walked through the key steps to an offsite leadership team retreat that refocuses the team on critical strategic issues to strengthen their teamwork and their culture.

You can now view the archived webinar by [clicking here](#).

Practical Ways Leaders Can Model Culture Change

A department, division, or organization's culture **ripples out from its leadership team**. A team that wants to change "them" needs to start with a deep look in the mirror to change "us." Organizational behavior reflects leadership team behavior. This is much like an old parenting adage, "children are natural mimics; they act like their parents despite attempts to teach them good manners."



In their 10-year global study of leadership and culture development (published in their book ***Beyond Performance: How Great Organizations Build Ultimate Competitive Advantage***), Scott Keller and Colin Price report, "programs in which leaders model the desired changes are four times more likely to be successful. In an organizational context, the key elements of role modeling are transformation among senior leaders, symbolic acts, and developing a cadre of 'influence leaders.'"

Here are just a few ways leadership teams can model the behavior they want to see rippling throughout their culture:

- Bring customers, customer advocates (salespeople are excellent ones) and front line service deliverers to key planning and operational sessions.
- Put on an apron or pick up the phone and serve customers without being introduced as top leaders. You'll be sending important signals. And might even learn something.
- Serve your producers and servers. Continually ask them what the leadership team can do to help them provide higher levels of service/quality. Hold managers accountable for serving their teams.
- Overlook weaknesses unless they're clearly causing problems and must be addressed. Develop and nurture strengths that align with the individual's passions and what the organization needs from him or her.
- Celebrate, honor, cheer, applaud, reinforce, laud, praise, extol, and otherwise reinforce all behaviors that exemplify your core values and desired culture.
- Ensure leaders are first in line for leadership and key skill development. Model those skills in meetings, coaching activities, and team decision making and planning. And having senior leaders deliver those sessions to the next level of managers infuses the training with a whole new sense of priority.
- Search out and destroy all executive status symbols, perks, or privileges that contribute to the "we/they" gap.
- Agree on three or four Strategic Imperatives that will strengthen your culture. Establish cross-functional teams to lead those changes and set a rigorous follow through process with regular updates to the leadership team.
- Get unfiltered and anonymous feedback on your leadership effectiveness with 360 assessments. Build personal and team development plans around that feedback that leverages strengths and addresses any "fatal flaws." Involve others in your personal and team development process.
- Hold regular meetings with team members in groups and individually to discuss your leadership and culture development progress.

The most effective communication is face to face. The most believable communication is behavior.

You can watch our recent *Executive Team Building and Culture Development* webinar for a deeper look.

Redefining Performance Management: How Celgene and General Motors are Approaching the Challenge

Studies show that performance appraisals improve performance 1/3 of the time, reduce it 1/3 of the time, and has no effect the other 1/3 of the time. Clearly, we have a problem. This abysmal performance of performance management has caused **traditional performance appraisals to be abandoned by a third of U.S. firms.**

A vital question is, what's the point of performance management? Many organizations now realize that conversations need to shift from accountability (which usually means "rank, spank, and yank") to learning, growing, and developing.

How many of these points describe your experience with performance management:

- "Sawing sawdust" by rehashing the past rather than focusing on the future?
- Reduces self-confidence and self-esteem?



- Reflects the manager's bias and narrow personal perceptions?
- Focused on more recent events instead of the bigger organizational context and career direction?
- Driven by compensation decisions and justifications?
- Consumes valuable time and energy with little payoff?
- Replaces on-going feedback with a fill-in-the-forms exercise neither side enjoys or finds useful?

If your performance management system resembles any of these remarks, you might want to watch **Jack Zenger and Joe Folkman's 45 minute complimentary webinar now available in our archive**. During this session, they talked with Crystal Zuckerman from Celegene and Maria Brennan from General Motors about their work in changing performance management practices.

Jack and Joe also reported on their research and analysis of what boosts performance management. Some of what they'll cover includes:

- Why performance management in some form is here to stay
- How to make the system accurate and fair
- Making performance discussions inspiring and motivating
- Cultural requirements to create thriving performance management practices
- The effective relationship of performance management and compensation
- Meeting the challenge of using multi-rater feedback
- Coaching skills and tools to elevate performance management discussions

Click on ***Redefining Performance Management webinar*** to watch the session.

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:

She provides "seven accelerants" outlining useful steps for leaders to reinvent themselves by building on strengths.

"Chutes and Ladders: Driving Corporate Innovation through Personal Disruption" -- Interview (podcast and e-book) of Whitney Johnson, author, and Top Thinker on Talent
<http://zengerfolkman.com>

"The innovator's dilemma is whether you jump or don't jump, there's risk. But it's always better to disrupt yourself rather than be disrupted, as a company, but certainly as an individual. "

A review of how critical speed is to leadership and a deeper look at leveraging innovation to boost speed and leadership.

"3 Simple Ways To Improve Your Innovation Skills" -- Jack Zenger
<http://www.forbes.com>

"What are the qualities that are the precursors to some people being highly innovative and not

being confined by the past? Something prompts them to break out of the mold, to see their world in new and fresh ways, and to have the courage to try something new."

Overcoming resistance to an outsider as a new leader is challenging and without skillful leadership often leads to failure.

"Newly Hired? Here's How To Be Sure You Succeed" -- Joe Folkman
www.forbes.com

"Did you know as a new senior leader in an organization you are twice as likely to be rated as one of the least effective leaders than as one of the best? Follow these ten tips to ensure the reputation and credibility you bring from your former position will follow you well."

An excellent discussion of the current challenges and opportunities for elevating and refocusing performance management.

"The Power of Continuous Feedback" -- Interview (podcast and e-book) of Steffen Maier
<http://zengerfolkman.com>

"Steffen Maier, co-founder and Chief Marketing Officer of Impraise, joins Jack Zenger to discuss continuous feedback, its relationship to pay, and how it can replace annual performance reviews."

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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