



## Issue 192 - March 2019

Last month's issue featured an exchange I had with a reader on [Dealing with Stupid Busy Leadership Teams Overloading Their Organization](#). I wrote that strong leaders like George who refuse to be victimized by undisciplined senior leaders have three choices.

Paul, "a first level manager" e-mailed to tell me about a "fourth option I've used at a large, bureaucratic organization with some positive results." He explains, "I started a grassroots effort to change the culture. A team of

high powered technical folks I pulled together decided to start teaching others about positive psychology ([click here](#) for more on this new field). We do this on our own time and developed the materials ourselves, so the message fits the organization. The idea is to improve morale by improving the mood of many individuals, as opposed to waiting for a great leader to change the organization. It's starting to work, at least a little. We've run ten classes and taught over 200 people, and there's a waiting list for the next class. Unfortunately, 200 people are only a couple percent of the company's total population, and sometimes it feels like we're tilting at windmills. That said, we've been at it for about three years, lots of people tell others to take the class, and we're starting to engage the company leadership to leverage what we've done. It's got real momentum."



Paul provides a great example of leadership as an action, not a position. Leadership is what we do, not who we are. All too many people in leadership roles don't act like leaders. And there are many people who haven't been given formal leadership authority but are very strong leaders. We all need to be leaders -- in our personal lives or taking a leading role in our family, communities, profession, relationships, or workplace.

It's all too easy to be like the thirty-eight-year-old man who was at his parent's home for Sunday dinner. He mournfully turned the discussion to his many problems, "I've just left my third failed marriage, I can't hold onto a job, I'm in debt up to my ears and will have to declare personal bankruptcy," he complained bitterly. "Where did you go wrong?"

Leaders don't wait, they initiate. Leading ourselves and others up the leadership stairs is the route to better health, happiness, and success. We need "leaderful" teams and organizations to move everyone upward to ever higher performance and results. "I/we are going to do something" is the language of success. "Something must be done" is the language of failure.

The action of leading -- seeing possibilities, encouraging and supporting, reframing, and overcoming helplessness with hopefulness -- needs to be broadly shared by everyone everywhere regardless of formal roles or positions.

This issue looks at a few angles of leadership. Passion and love are key elements of leadership. Strong leaders are highly passionate about their work and inspire others around him or her with a deeper sense of meaning and purpose.

Strong leaders bring life to the hackneyed phrases of "walk the talk" and "lead by example." Their actions do all the talking. And strong leaders balance efficiency and effectiveness. Processes and systems are vital. But unless the whole organization is fully automated and has no people in it, leadership is a critical catalyst. Strong leaders bring life to the hackneyed phrases of "walk the talk" and "lead by example." Their actions do all the talking. And strong leaders balance efficiency and effectiveness. Processes and systems are vital. But unless the whole organization is fully automated and has no people in it, leadership is a critical catalyst that boosts or blocks process, systems, and technology.

An ancient Chinese proverb teaches that "The person who waits for a roast duck to fly into their mouth must wait a very long time." Don't wait; initiate.

## For the L of It: Leadership and Love

I once asked a manager how many people work for his company. He said, "About half." After we assessed their organizational culture, we found he was overly optimistic. They had a very large number of disengaged people. It wasn't hard to see why the organization's results were poor and getting worse. As someone in a focus group quipped, "The most dangerous place in this organization is at the exit door around quitting time. You'll get trampled."

In another organization, I was facilitating a development workshop with a few "prisoners" as participants. Actually, calling them "participants" was generous. They'd been forced to attend and weren't participating in our discussions. One finally said, "Jim, I think you're confusing us with people who give a (bleeeeeppp)."

More than 90 percent of people surveyed in a *Psychology Today* study aspired to produce the highest quality work possible. But less than 50 percent said they only work hard enough to keep their jobs. The main reason they gave for this big difference was frustration with management practices.

The day of passion and love -- Valentine's Day -- is tomorrow. It's a good time to reflect on the vital connections of leadership and love. [Management is "head work," and leadership is "heart work."](#) Leadership is emotional. Leadership deals with feelings. Leadership is about dreams, inspiration, excitement, desire, pride, care, passion, and love.

Passion and love are affairs of the heart, not the head. We aren't rational creatures. Humans use thinking and reason to solve problems and make plans. But it's our hearts more than our heads that move us. Most "rational thinking" is justifying actions that start with our feelings. We often make decisions that "feel right," then start looking for the "facts" to support them.

Clarence Francis, former chairman of General Foods, once observed, "You can buy a person's time; you can buy his physical presence at a given place; you can even buy a measured number of his skilled muscular motions per hour. But you cannot buy enthusiasm... you cannot buy loyalty... you cannot buy the devotion of hearts, minds, or souls. You must earn these."



A stronger indicator of management's ability to energize or enervate team members is absenteeism. When I was a kid, I didn't enjoy school very much. So, I was sick a lot. Once I found my life work and pursued career choices I loved, my health improved miraculously.

The culture of too many organizations is like the bumper sticker "I am neither for nor against apathy." There's a big price for managers' failure to engage the hearts of people. When we're excited about our work -- when we feel like valued partners and have a commitment to our team and to reaching our goals together -- we're much less likely to call in sick.

When I feel like my boss doesn't care much about me, if my work is boring and routine, if I am just a pair of hired hands, the group I am part of is not really a team, I don't know and don't really care what our organization does or what customers think about our products and services, then I will call in sick at the first sniffle. Not to mention that feeling down lowers my immune system and makes me much more susceptible to whatever bugs are going around.

The author and poet, Samuel Ullman, wrote, "Age may wrinkle the face, but lack of enthusiasm wrinkles the soul" (now there's a scary thought -- just imagine the leathery, shriveled souls of apathetic people).

Is your leadership sparking and smothering the flames of passion and commitment in your team? Or maybe you just don't care...

## Culture Drift or Shift: Team Members Learn What They Live

Many organizations have a set of core values along with vision and mission statements. And many leaders are frustrated that people in their organizations aren't getting the message. Teamwork, customer service, quality, trust, communication, or whatever's declared as culture ideals aren't lived.

But people are getting the culture message from their leaders. They see it loud and clear. Culture ripples out from the leadership team.



As parents raising our young family, Heather and I were inspired by Dorothy Law Nolte's poem, [Children Learn What They Live](#). Here's a leadership version I rewrote for leaders trying to shift their culture:

*If a team member lives with fear,  
He learns to avoid risk-taking.*

*If a team member lives with criticism,  
She learns to focus on what's wrong.*

*If a team member lives with micromanagement,  
She learns to not trust her own judgement.*

*If a team member lives with ridicule,  
He learns to avoid trying new things.*

*If a team member lives with mistrust,  
He learns to be suspicious.*

*If a team member lives with hostility,  
She learns how to be defensive.*

*If a team member lives with indifference,  
He learns not to care.*

*If a team member lives with appreciation,  
She learns to make an extra effort.*

*If a team member lives with openness,  
He learns how to be honest.*

*If a team member lives with experimentation,  
She learns how to be innovative.*

*If a team member lives with great coaching,  
He learns how to leverage strengths.*

*If a team member lives with encouragement,  
She learns how to be confident.*

*If a team member lives with positive visions,  
He learns how to be inspired.*

*If a team member lives with flexibility,  
She learns how to master change.*

A young boy came home and told his Dad that the other kids kept stealing his pencils at school. The father stomped off to the school to complain. "It's not a matter of the pencils," he bellowed to his son's teacher, "I get plenty of those from work. It's the principle of the thing that bothers me most."

What leaders *do* often shouts so loud people can't hear what they're saying.

## **Losing Heart...and People: Confusing Efficiency and Effectiveness**

Recently I worked with the senior leadership team of a large warehouse and logistics company. They're growing so rapidly they're having big problems finding people to staff their distribution centers.

A major part of that problem is turnover. They're losing warehouse workers almost as quickly as they're hired. Costs are soaring and projected to get worse.

As I listened to their leaders focus on hard processes, metrics, and systems it became crystal clear that the "soft skills" of leadership and culture weren't even on their radar. Their plans to reduce their horrendous engagement and retention problem focused on better hiring/orientation practices and HR systems.



In the strategy session, the CEO declared that technical and analytical skills were the key to career advancement at their company. He went so far as to state, "you can be a complete a--hole as long as you're the smartest person in the room."

Listening to the team's strategies and plans, reminded me of the efficiency expert's report on hearing a symphony at the Royal Festival Hall in London. I first read this years ago in Paul Dickson's book, *The Official Rules*. He says there are a number of versions of this report dating back to 1955. Today experts in lean, ERP systems, or process improvement might give a similar report.

*For considerable periods, the four oboe players had nothing to do. The number should be reduced and the work spread more evenly over the whole of the concert, thus eliminating peaks of activity.*

*All the twelve violins were playing identical notes; this seems unnecessary duplication. The staff of this section should be drastically cut. If a larger volume of sound is required, it could be obtained by electronic apparatus.*

*Much effort was absorbed in the playing of demi-semi-quavers; this seems an unnecessary refinement. It is recommended that all notes should be rounded up to the nearest semi-quaver. If this was done it would be possible to use trainees and lower grade operatives more extensively.*

*There seems to be too much repetition of some musical passages. Scores should be drastically pruned. No useful purpose is served by repeating on the horns a passage that has already been handled by the strings. It is estimated that if all redundant passages were eliminated, the whole concert time of two hours could be reduced to twenty minutes and there would be no need for an intermission.*

*The conductor agrees generally with these recommendations, but expressed the opinion that there might be some falling off in box-office receipts. In that unlikely event it should be possible to close sections of the auditorium entirely, with a consequential saving of overhead expenses, lighting, attendance, etc. If the worst came to the worst, the whole thing could be abandoned and the public could go to Albert Hall instead.*

#### Further Reading:

- [New Studies Show "Soft Skills" Are Now a Critical Priority](#)
- [Great Places to Work Reflect Great Cultures = Great Results](#)
- [Has Your Culture Created a Great Place to Work for All?](#)
- [Let's be Frank: In search of a company's lost heart](#)
- [Lean Leadership: Boosting or Blocking Lean/Six Sigma Tools and Techniques](#)

## 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:



Learn what's critical to building a foundation of trust based on a study of 360 assessments of 87,000 leaders.

[\*The Three Elements of Trust\*](#), Jack Zenger and Joe Folkman, **Harvard Business Review**

Nina provides a very useful career checkup to ensure we're not heading off to "day prison" in our workplace.

[\*How to Get Passion Out of Your Work\*](#), Nina Spencer, *The Globe & Mail*

## 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](mailto:Jim.Clemmer@ClemmerGroup.com) or connect with me on [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), or my [blog](#)!

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