

Jim Clemmer's *Leader Letter*



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Practical Leadership Blog

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MAY 2012, ISSUE 110

The month of May is thought to have been named for the Greek goddess Maia. In ancient Roman lore she was identified with fertility, considered an earth goddess, and embodied the concept of growth.

On the farm where I grew up, May was an extremely busy month in the fields. There was a short window to get the crops planted so they've had enough time to grow during the summer before the killing frosts of fall.

I now maintain my earth connection through my perennial gardens. May's a very busy month of clean up, planting, and fertilizing. In *King Henry IV*, Shakespeare recognizes this high energy time with the words "**as full of spirit as the month of May.**"

What seeds are you planting? How's your team's growth? Which crops is your organization nurturing for future harvests?

Hopefully, you'll find lots of fertile leadership insights, inspiration, and instruction in this month's issue. We'll look at building leadership capacity, unlocking the secrets of extraordinary leaders, and planting the seeds of inspiring leadership.

As epitomized in the goddess Maia, women have long been nurturers and growers. But we'll look at a new study examining whether



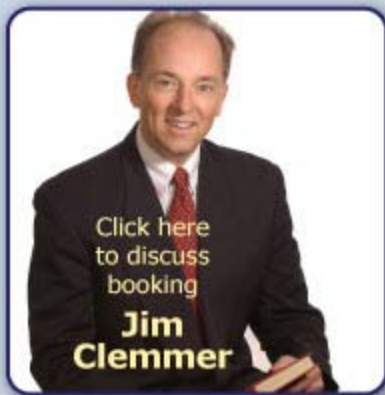
[Leandro Bassano \(Italian artist 1557 - 1622\)](#)

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women have grown beyond that stereotypical role and have become better overall leaders than men. High-performance teams are "as full of spirit as the month of May." Use the 10 point checklist in this issue as a team growth check up.

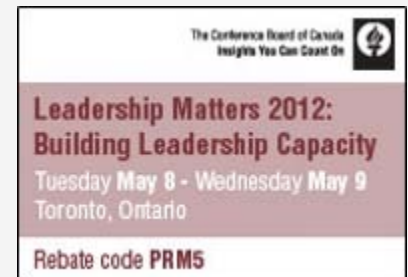
Human Resource or people skills are vital nutrients that can accelerate team and organizational growth. We'll look at an excellent new benchmarking tool for HR/people competencies. And reading books can lead to high growth -- if they're the right ones. I'll outline what I've found distinguish the most fertile from the thousands of weedy books that suck energy from our soil.

Fields and gardens can be well cultivated or allowed to run wild. Nature abhors a vacuum, so plants will grow. What we sow and nurture is what we reap. May you use this time to refill your spirit and plant the seeds of success!

LEADERSHIP MATTERS: WE MUST BUILD CAPACITY

Leadership fast resembles the famous Mark Twain quote about the weather -- everybody's always talking about it but nobody does anything about it. Based on their ongoing research, The Conference Board of Canada concludes,

"Building leadership capacity has been a top priority for several years, at least on paper. The problem is that, while many organizations have been talking about it, few have invested adequately in developing tomorrow's leaders today. This must change. The quality of leadership matters to the very success of organizations."



Our daily news is filled with sad examples of massive leadership failures. Jobs are lost, shareholder value is destroyed, and once successful companies crash and burn.

And "we ain't seen nothing yet!" Companies face fierce competition, globalization, rising costs, and relentless margin pressures. Government deficits and public debt are at record levels while an aging population coupled with soaring social "entitlements" and healthcare costs hit taxpayer resistance. And labor unrest is growing.

The Conference Board of Canada identifies six key leadership challenges facing us today:

- "Aging leadership poised for retirement: Conference Board research confirms many organizations are concerned about impending retirements of senior leaders and managers.

- Depleted middle ranks: Many key potential future leaders were downsized in previous economic downturns, leaving a shortfall of promotable, experienced staffers.
- Lack-lustre succession planning: One international study found that, while 98 per cent of those surveyed regarded CEO succession planning as important, only 35 per cent actually had a succession plan and were prepared for an unexpected or planned CEO departure!
- Glass ceilings, sticky floors: Despite years of effort and discussion, research shows women and visible minorities are still underrepresented in key leadership positions -- undermining organizational potential.
- New world, new leadership skills: Technological change, globalization, workforce internationalization, flatter organizations, economic uncertainty, and changing employee and customer expectations are only some of the changes that demand a whole new set of leadership skills and competencies.
- Outdated and ineffective leadership development programs: While the need is great, evidence suggests that organizations are not doing enough to improve their leadership development programs. IBM's worldwide survey of HR executives found that just one third of respondents felt their organizations could 'develop leaders effectively.'

Study after study shows we have a critical leadership vacuum. Only a minority of people rate their leaders highly. Trust, morale, and engagement levels are at all time lows. Many people are planning to leave and find a new job as the economy improves and jobs become more plentiful. Younger generations are entering our workplaces with much less tolerance for poor leadership than their parents. They expect work-life balance, to be valued, treated as adults, and persuaded -- not just told -- why they should improve, change, or perform at higher levels (they are Generation Why).

These timely issues are being addressed by the Conference Board of Canada's powerful conference [Leadership Matters 2012: Building Leadership Capacity](#). This two-day event is in Toronto on May 8 and 9, 2012 and features a powerful line-up of Canada's top senior executives, renowned thought leaders, and leading practitioners outlining and illustrating the vital skills and approaches so critical in mastering today's organizational challenges. It's a rare opportunity for highly concentrated leadership development.

Given my decades long work with the good people at The Conference Board we've put together a special rate for you to attend. You can save \$455 by entering The CLEMMER Group rebate code PRM5 when you register. View the full list of speakers and agenda [here](#). [Register now!](#) Enter The CLEMMER Group rebate code PRM5 to save \$455. For more information contact Tracie Jones at jones@conferenceboard.ca or 613-526-3090 x 286.

FREE WEBCAST: LEADERSHIP AND CULTURE DEVELOPMENT FOR HIGHER HEALTH AND SAFETY

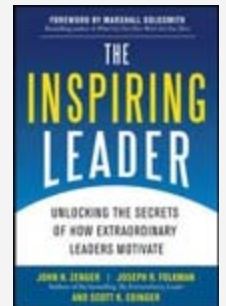
Safety is a leadership and culture issue. There are very few strictly "safety problems." But there are many leadership and organization effectiveness problems that show up in accidents, sickness, and other symptoms of organizational failure. Like incompetent doctors, ineffective managers sicken, hurt, or kill people.



Join me for a rare and powerful 60 minute [webcast](#) on May 23 @ 3:00 (EDT) that challenges popular safety programs and shows how to provide the leadership that aligns processes and people for healthier, safer, and more effective organizations. [Register for this free webcast now!](#)

REVIEW OF *THE INSPIRING LEADER: UNLOCKING THE SECRETS OF HOW EXTRAORDINARY LEADERS MOTIVATE*

This is an extraordinary book on leadership from the experts in extraordinary leadership. In 2002, legendary training and development expert Jack Zenger (he's been given numerous international awards and citations) and Joe Folkman (renowned psychometrician with extensive expertise in survey research and leader assessments) published their groundbreaking book [The Extraordinary Leader: Turning Good Managers into Great Leaders](#). That book was based on their extensive database of more than 200,000 multi-rater or 360-degree feedback reports describing 20,000 managers. It became the foundation for Zenger Folkman's thriving leadership development and consulting firm.



[The Inspiring Leader](#) draws from this deep well of research to bring an evidence-based or hard scientific approach to the very soft issue of inspirational leadership. There are countless opinions, platitudes, theories, anecdotes, and leadership models competing for attention today. Periodically I search Amazon for an update on how many leadership books are available. Today's search shows over 50,000!

What's refreshingly unique about all of Zenger Folkman's books and services is their very powerful combination of solid research, building on strengths, and practical how-to applications. As they write in Chapter One, *"this book is not a creation of ideas for how leaders inspire. Rather, it provides you with a discovery of what the best leaders around the world do to inspire and motivate others."*

[The Inspiring Leader](#) emerged from Zenger Folkman's ongoing analysis of their extraordinary leader database in answer to the question **"So if I have to choose one thing to work on, what should it be?"** A deeper look at their leadership research led to the conclusion; **"that there was one leadership competency that deserved some special attention. It was 'inspires and motivates to high performance.'"**

This proved to be the most powerful predictor of anyone being seen as an extraordinary leader from their empirical field of 16 leadership competencies. Tens of thousands of frontline staff and team members resoundingly identified this competency as the one they wanted most in their leader. It was also the competency most associated with high levels of employee engagement, and **"consistently the most highly correlated with those employees who would recommend the organization to a friend, seldom thought about leaving, and were willing to go the extra mile."**

As the Zenger Folkman team sifted and sliced their leadership data on inspirational leadership they identified three attributes forming the cornerstone for inspiring and motivating others: 1. **Role Model**; 2. **Change Champion**; and 3. **Initiator**. After showing the impact of each of these attributes, the section of the book provides a series of practical steps on behaviors and actions leaders can take to strengthen all three.

Their chapter on "Using Emotion: The DNA of Inspiration" aligns very well with the growing research on Emotional Intelligence. Once again, the authors move from insightful understanding to application. As with most of the other chapters, this one ends with bulleted and very helpful Steps to Take.

The largest part of [The Inspiring Leader](#) are chapters on six core leadership behaviors that inspire and motivate:

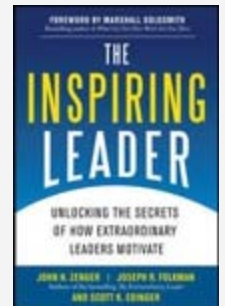
1. Setting stretch goals
2. Creating vision and direction
3. Communicating powerfully
4. Developing people
5. Being collaborative and a good team player
6. Fostering innovation

Each chapter explains and illustrates the leadership behavior and provides examples, keys, processes, and how-to steps. One of the final chapters on *"Most Common Mistakes in Inspiring Others"* is built around a top ten list of uninspirational behavior.

This is a rare gem buried in the growing pile of leadership books. Like a precious gem its value comes from its rarity. [*The Inspiring Leader*](#) uniquely and powerfully combines research on what the most inspiring leaders **actually do**, insightful examples, short, pithy, bite-sized sections in simple and very readable language, and how-to, practical steps to move you from inspiration to application. Highly recommended.

THOUGHTS THAT MAKE YOU GO HMMM ON... *THE INSPIRING LEADER*

Here are a few insights drawn from [*The Inspiring Leader: Unlocking the Secrets of How Extraordinary Leaders Motivate*](#):



"Adequate leaders get everyone to do their jobs, but inspirational leaders are able to get people to rise far above that mark and achieve more."

"Inspiration and emotion are inextricably linked together. The inspiring leader learns how to use this other realm of life, despite the fact that we seldom have any formal education or training that would help us to be good at it. The fact is that the proper use of emotion is a key factor in the success of every inspiring leader ... the leader's emotions are 'super contagious.'"

"One factor that was twice as powerful as anything else in predicting the teams' success was the ratio of positive comments (approval, suggestions, praise, appreciation, compliments, and overall support) to negative comments (pointing out faults, disparagement, criticism, or disapproval). The ratio of positive to negative comments in the highest-performing teams was 5 to 1, in medium-performing teams it was just below 2 to 1, and in the low-performing teams it was roughly 1 positive for every 3 negative. Studies done in both industry and marriage counseling reinforce the value of positive communication outnumbering any kind of negative messages by roughly 5 to 1.3."

"...the delegation process that is so familiar to leaders and carried out so frequently can occur in a perfunctory fashion. In that case, the motivational dimension of it will be minimal at best. Or, delegation can be elevated to an important discussion and can be wrapped with important messages that inspire and that generate positive motivation. It is all about how the leader elects to conduct the discussion."

"Innovation is connected to inspiration. That is a statistical fact. Frankly, we were a bit surprised at the strong link between the two. We never would have predicted it. But in every organization that we studied, this factor jumped out. There is obviously something about a leader's encouraging innovation that has an extremely powerful impact on people. People are jazzed by the opportunity to participate in new and exciting activities."

BOOK REVIEWS AND MY RECOMMENDED READING LIST

In the past few months I've been asked by workshop participants and readers for my recommendations on organization improvement, leadership, or personal development books. One example was an e-mail from a manager at the American Society of Training and Development:



"We are building our reference list for the ASTD Forum Lab in India in October. The theme is Executive global leadership. We'd like your recommendations for our reference list."

A safety leadership consultant from Australia wrote:

"I have just finished [The Leader's Digest](#) and thought your leadership wheel was good. I am going to get more of your [books](#). I have read about 30 leadership books including Maxwell, Kouzes & Posner, Kotter, and Schein.

I was wondering if there are any other books you could particularly recommend. I am only interested in the theory as far as it extends to practical outcomes. I have read a few of the books from CEOs or Ex-CEOs who have transformed American companies. They usually spend a lot of time telling you what great blokes they are. These have left me pretty cold."

I am also left pretty cold by -- generally puffed up -- autobiographies written by CEOs detailing their leadership experiences and "insights." If their ghost writer is especially skilled, "the bloke's" story can be quite entertaining. But generally there's little to be applied or learned from reading their book. Journalists writing books about business leaders usually write them for entertainment and leave behind very few leadership lessons.

You can find my recommended reading list in the nearly three dozen book reviews on my [LinkedIn](#) or [Amazon](#) profile. If you're a LinkedIn member and view my profile, please send me an invitation to connect -- if we're not already connected.

I am often asked to review manuscripts and provide a "jacket quote" for new books that are scheduled for publication or whose authors are looking for a publisher. I am not in the publishing industry and I am certainly not an expert in what makes one book a bestseller and another die on book store shelves. Some mediocre (or worse) books are bestsellers because of strong marketing, a great title, or they've caught a trend. Some outstanding books sell very poorly.

Following is what I consider in deciding whether to endorse a book or put it on my recommended reading list. Few books score high on all criteria items. But those I recommend or endorse score well on most of these points:

- Writing style: is it conversational, personal, and high energy?
- Wit and humor: is the book fun to read?
- Logic and flow: is the book easy to follow along?
- Generalities and platitudes: is there real substance or a unique perspective?
- Original context or phrasing: is it just rehashing or piecing together other people's material?
- Stories and examples: are they crisp, succinct, and relevant?
- Research, studies, and citations: are the approaches supported by facts and analysis or just theories and suppositions?
- Practical applications: are there lots of "how to" steps and implementation suggestions?
- System, model, or framework: do the chapters connect together and have an integrated approach or methodology?
- Heart and soul: does it touch deep emotions and the human spirit?

What do you look for in an organization improvement, leadership, or personal development book? Which ones do you recommend and why?

RARE PUBLIC WORKSHOP - JUNE 5-6: LEADING @ THE SPEED OF CHANGE TRANSFORMING PERSONAL, TEAM, AND ORGANIZATION PERFORMANCE

Is your team overwhelmed by meetings, projects, and a torrent of "top priorities?" Scrambling to juggle endless changes? Call a team time out. You need to step back to step ahead. There's nothing like a few days away to reflect, renew, energize, and gain a fresh perspective. This workshop gives your group the opportunity to work together on specific company issues while participating in your own development. Take advantage of team discounts of up to \$200 per participant.



"Knowledgeable, entertaining, and motivating. Re-focused and inspired me."

- Jen Spence, City of Burlington

Don't miss out on the only public workshop I'll be doing this year. Bring your team and [save \\$100 - \\$200](#) each. You can find full [details, discounts, and registration](#) here. [Register today!](#)

NEW STUDY SHOWS WOMEN DO IT BETTER THAN MEN

Jack Zenger and Joe Folkman ignited a firestorm of interest and debate with their March *Harvard Business Review* blog post [Are Women Better Leaders than Men?](#) Based on a recent survey of 7,280 leaders the study reinforced some long held beliefs and uncovered a few surprises in the gender debate.



They did confirm that 2/3 of leaders are men, and in higher organizational levels there are even higher numbers of men in charge. And women proved to be better at nurturing competencies such as developing others and building relationships.

But women's strengths went much further and were broader than the nurturing stereotypes. Zenger and Folkman found, *"at every level, more women were rated by their peers, their bosses, their direct reports, and their other associates as better overall leaders than their male counterparts -- and the higher the level, the wider that gap grows."* Women were rated higher in 12 of the 16 competencies derived from 30 years of research and ZengerFolkman's large survey database.

Their blog post has generated over 200 comments and perspectives on this issue so far. *The Washington Post* reports on "a whirlwind of response ...one of the most read articles on the (HBR) site in the past 30 days." [Jena McGregor published an interview with Zenger and Folkman last Friday](#). Here are a few interesting conclusions:

- Women's overall higher ratings weren't just for their "soft skills" such as communications and nurturing. They were also ahead of most men in "taking initiative," "practicing self-development," and "driving for results."
- Women tend to be more motivated, seek feedback more often, and do a better job of learning from it.
- Men performed better than women at customer service.
- Many organizations are sitting on a huge pool of talented women that is being underutilized.
- Joe Folkman urges us to see beyond this as a gender issue. He explains, "***if you really want to be a great leader, be a little paranoid. Ask for feedback. We are very optimistic in the ability for people to develop these skills.***"
- Senior managers rated the women in this study even more positively overall than did peers or direct reports.

Here's where you can explore more interviews and articles on this and related research:

- [Click here](#) to watch a brief interview/discussion with Jack Zenger around this research on *CBS This Morning*.
- "[Filling the Talent Pool - With Women](#)" - Forbes column by Jack Zenger.
- "[Anything Men Can Do, Women Can Do Better](#)" - *Chief Learning Officer*
- "[Ladies First: Studies Show Women Are Better Leaders. So Why Aren't There More of Us Leading?](#)" - *The Huffington Post*

To all those men in senior executive roles -- especially technical organizations -- wake up! Jack Zenger noted that "*when looking at the percentage of males and females who were rated the highest and the lowest, females have a lower percentage of the worst and a higher percentage of the best.*" Why aren't you using all that strength?

USE THIS CHECKLIST FOR A TEN POINT MANAGEMENT TEAM CHECK UP

Last month I posted a blog on [Use This 10 Point Checklist for a Leadership Check Up](#). This was developed as I prepared for [this year's only open/public Leading @ the Speed of Change workshop](#) here in the center of the universe - my hometown of Kitchener, Ontario (just 45 minutes west of Toronto airport).



Past workshops clearly showed that management teams working together on developing their leadership effectiveness is especially powerful. Here's a team checklist to assess your strengths and gaps:

1. What percent of your team meetings are spent in Leading (optimistic, courageous, visionary, innovative, possibilities), Following (waiting, wondering, cautious, passive, wavering), or Wallowing (complaining, blaming, pessimistic, cynical, helpless) modes? What percentage of time would you like to spend in each area?
2. What percent of your team time is spent on Technical (dealing with technical issues, product/service reviews, applying expertise), Management (operational reviews, information updates, analysis and planning), and Leadership (people discussions/decisions, vision/values/culture, "soft skills" development)? What percentage of time would you like to spend in each area?
3. Does your team have a clear and compelling picture of your preferred future that's emotionally engaging? Do you have 3 - 5 core values that actively frame your behaviors with each other and the rest of your organization? Is there a deep sense of purpose energizing you into a highly bonded team?
4. Does your team actively set strategies and develop leadership skills to influence upward and outward?
5. Are there touchy issues that aren't openly discussed and debated in team forums but team members talk about them to each other outside the meeting?
6. Does your team regularly seek feedback/perceptions and probe to understand what's engaging and disengaging everyone else throughout your organization? Is there a tendency to minimize negative feedback/survey data ("that's not reality, that's just their perception")?
7. Does your team clearly model and actively build purpose, pride, and team spirit throughout your organization?

8. Is coaching and growing people throughout your organization a defining role and central focus of your team?
9. Does your team have a good balance of using one-way information tools like e-mail, reports, and presentations with two-way conversations, open meetings, and bottom up discussions?
10. Does your team use healthy amounts of celebration, recognition, and appreciation to maintain a positive, can-do spirit, and highly energize your organization?

How are you doing? Which are your team's greatest strengths? How could you use those strengths to move your leadership from ordinary to extraordinary? Do you have any fatal flaws that need to be addressed? Use this checklist with your team to stimulate discussion and set development plans. You could have each person anonymously rate each question on a scale of 1 - 6 and hand or send them in to a neutral facilitator for tallying.

I'll be covering these points in my two-day [Leading @ the Speed of Change workshop on June 5 - 6](#). Bring your management team for maximum development. There's nothing like a few days away to reflect, renew, energize, and gain a fresh perspective. To get out of the acceleration and busyness traps your team needs a progress check. You need to slow down to go faster. Click on the title for more information and to register.

I'll also be covering these points in a one day *Leading @ the Speed of Change* public or open workshop in Winnipeg on May 29 sponsored by the Manitoba Quality Network (QNET). [Click here for full details and to register](#).

CAREER GPS IS AN EXCELLENT BENCHMARKING TOOL FOR HR ISSUES

Toronto-based Human Resources Professionals Association (HRPA) has just released an excellent new "Career GPS" tool. This online assessment is designed to help HR professionals pinpoint and track their professional development goals. But the first six of eight Domains provides a very useful summary and checklist of the critical "soft skills" everyone in a management position needs to build peak performing teams or organizations.



HRPA's competency model covers 85 competencies that are grouped into these eight Domains:

- Performance and Rewards
- Learning and Talent Development
- Employee Relations
- Organization Design and Development
- Leadership Development and Organizational Culture
- Organizational Health and Safety
- Function Management
- HR Leadership

You can see the full model with all 85 competencies listed at [HRPA's 85 Competencies](#).

The tool provides a menu for HR professionals to build a profile, assess their current ability across all 85 competencies, pinpoint the level of competence they have now for their current job, identify what competencies they need to develop for their dream job, and develop a personal development plan. An especially useful feature of HRPA's approach is the tiered competencies:

Level 1: Foundational: (early career level)

Level 2: Intermediate

Level 3: Advanced (senior level)

A big problem with many HR professionals is that they're at an entry or intermediate level when the organization really needs them to be advanced. Leadership and culture development, organization design and development, performance management, and learning/talent development are vital today. When HR professionals operate at senior or advanced levels they become key executive team members in building leadership and organizational capacity. But, sadly, way too many HR professionals are intermediate at best. So the exponential "people power" of the organization remains dormant and underutilized. This is a huge tragedy for everyone -- an all-around lose/lose.

If the HR function reports to you, HRPA's competency model provides a solid framework for discussion of expectations, performance, and the future growth of your HR VP, director, or manager.

Currently this online tool is available for non HRPA members to register and use. Go to [Career GPS](#) to check it out.

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 takes courage and discipline to tame our technologies and take control of our time. Good tips and interesting comments on a vital topic.

["The Magic of Doing One Thing at a Time"](#) -- Tony Schwartz
<http://blogs.hbr.org>

"Why is it that between 25% and 50% of people report feeling overwhelmed or burned out at work? It's not just the number of hours we're working, but also the fact that we spend too many continuous hours juggling too many things..."

It's amazing how few managers still don't get that poorly served and disengaged frontline staff causes poor customer service.

["Want to Improve Customer Service? Treat Your Employees Better"](#)-- Knowledge@Wharton
<http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu>

"How can firms ramp up their customer service efforts on the cheap? It's as simple as treating employees better -- so they will do the same for customers."

Managers too often point to short-term pressures as an excuse for their reactionary/crisis management and not building long term capacity.

["The High Risks of Short-Term Management"](#)--HBS Working Knowledge
<http://hbswk.hbs.edu>

"New research findings suggest that short-termism might have negative effects on these companies themselves and their investors. There's another surprise in the research: short-termism might not be as widespread as we think ..."

A fascinating example of just how ageless leadership principles really are -- and how tough it seems for many to learn from history.

["9 Timeless Leadership Lessons from Cyrus the Great"](#)--
Ryan Holiday
<http://www.forbes.com>

"Cyrus the Great, the man that historians call 'the most amiable of conquerors,' and the first king to found 'his empire on generosity' instead of violence and tyranny. Consider Cyrus the antithesis Machiavelli's ideal Prince."

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@Clemmer.net or connect with me on [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), [FaceBook](#), or my [blog](#)!

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

Jim





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