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In this Issue:

During a leadership development workshop, we were discussing keys to building accountability and ownership. One participant told us that he and his wife had their four-year-old grandson, Jordan, for a sleepover at their house. In the morning, he came running down the stairs and reported, "Grandma, Grandpa, somebody peed in my bed!" Now, who do you think did that? Was it that trickster, Grandpa?

Kids often avoid taking responsibility for their behaviors. This may extend into young siblings or classmates playing "the blame game" as they point fingers at others.

Ownership and accountability is a key performance issue. Whether people embrace ownership and take responsibility for their individual and team performance is highly dependent on leadership and culture. Self-accountability is really all there is. Getting people to take personal ownership is the only way to avoid the blame game.

Accountability can have vastly differing meanings depending on whether you're on the giving or receiving end. Many of us have been lashed with the accountability whip wielded by a manager playing "gotcha games." That's a

major factor in the destructive impact of performance appraisals or performance management systems. Too often, it's a "rank, spank, and yank" process; the dismal outcome of poor -- or non-existent -- coaching practices.

The purpose of performance discussions should be mutual learning and development. But many times, they're based on "accountability" that's really about fault finding and playing the blame game. Effective performance management systems are shifting from accountability to development. And research shows the best development is building strengths rather than finding and fixing performance gaps. This issue starts with a feedforward process for doing that.

Building a culture of accountability starts with leaders looking in the mirror. I can't get them to take more accountability until I step up and take accountability for my leadership. It's easy to come up with changes I'd like to see in others. It takes leadership courage to change me in order to change them.

Meetings are a great example. Many are so poorly run they're virtually useless. Or worse, they're black holes sucking in and destroying time and energy. Who's accountable for that? It starts with the meeting leader but includes all participants who enable bad meetings. In this issue, you'll find a meeting effectiveness checklist. Use it to step up and end the meeting madness.

An organization's culture ripples out from the team leading it. Too many leaders avoid personal feedback, while asking HR for performance appraisal systems. They fervently believe in accountability -- for everyone else.

Blissfully blind to their video out of sync with their audio, these leaders run sloppy meetings, but want a more disciplined organization. Disrespectful leaders tell team members to provide more respectful customer service. Leaders make snide remarks about their peers or other groups but want more teamwork. Leaders blaming "them" and making excuses for their own performance want to improve engagement and ownership. Leadership teams with poor decision-making processes want fast, flexible, and agile organizations. And leaders who don't follow through and keep commitments want more accountability in their organizations. Use the 10-point team checklist in this issue to assess whether you're leading a scream or a dream team?

Accountability is a slippery subject. Like beauty, excellence, or quality it's in the eye of the beholder. Accountability starts with that truism that's becoming a worn-out cliché, leading by example. Many leaders fail to recognize that their words and actions don't match -- like this sign on the door of a repair shop -- WE CAN REPAIR ANYTHING (please knock hard on the door…the buzzer doesn't work).

Are You Throwing Gasoline on the Performance Appraisal Dumpster Fire?

Do you eagerly look forward to giving or receiving performance appraisals? Does the experience feel like being poked in the eye with a sharp stick? Are you doing the poking?

Most people hate performance appraisals. Not only are they ineffective, they often scorch and burn. Research by Marie-Hélène Budworth, assistant professor of Human Resource Management at York University, shows that managers giving feedback to staff changed their performance 1/3 of the time, had no effect another 1/3 of the time, and actually reduced performance 1/3 of the time.

In a *Harvard Business Review* article on "The Performance Management Revolution," the authors write, "hated by bosses and subordinates alike, traditional performance appraisals have been abandoned by more than a third of U.S. companies." They report that performance focus is shifting from accountability to learning because of the return of people development, the need for agility, and the centrality of teamwork. That's also why 360 assessments are much more effective when they're **developmental** rather than used for measurement.

I recently came across a 12-minute YouTube **presentation** with Marie-Hélène giving her research on a strength-based alternative called Feedforward Performance Management. This clip's a good summary of Marie-Hélène's steps (partnering with a leader using that approach) presented at a Canadian Positive Psychology Association conference a few years ago:

1. **Introduction** -- begin with an overview of how this is a different conversation and highlights what the coachee is proud of. A key objective is aligning personal examples with organizational goals.
2. **Story** -- move to discuss examples of a highlight or something the coachee felt good about -- happy, energized, in flow (even before the results of his or her actions become known).
3. **Peak** -- the peak of the story. What did the coachee think at the peak moment?
4. **Condition** -- the manager then probes for conditions, feelings, thinking, success points, characteristics, strengths, etc. that allowed the story to happen.
5. **Feedforward** -- end with discussing the upcoming period and what the coachee is doing to draw from his or her strengths/successes. To what degree do the coachee's plans take him or her closer to or further away from the conditions just described?

Imagine the impact of this approach on you or someone you're coaching? Would you feel beat up or charged up?

Zenger Folkman's research shows:

- Managers who are mediocre at feedback and coaching have employee engagement scores 20 points below the average.
- Managers who do not provide feedback in honest and helpful ways have teams that report 15 points below average on receiving fair treatment.
- In a study of 11,350 employees, only 7% gave their manager high marks on providing honest, straightforward coaching and feedback.

On the other hand, ZF research shows:

- No other leadership behavior correlates higher with increasing employee engagement than a leader's effectiveness at coaching.
- Leaders effective at coaching have 3 times more team members willing to "go the extra mile."
- Leaders effective at coaching and feedback have teams reporting 40% less intention to leave.

How are you doing? Are you putting away that stick and gasoline?

Visit **Performance Management** if you'd like to peruse a selection of related blogs, research, and webinars.

Scream Team or Dream Team? A 10-Point Team Check Up

An organization's culture **ripples** out from the team leading it. The behaviors of the leadership team are THE single biggest **influence** on what's expected/rewarded and discouraged or unacceptable for everyone else. Despite what's proclaimed in vision, mission, or core values, these set the organization's true cultural norms.

Team meetings reflect the team's effectiveness. Too many virtual or in-person meetings **waste** time and frustrate everyone. As Jack Zenger and Joe Folkman report in their book, *Speed: How Leaders Accelerate Successful Execution*, "One of the most frequent written complaints people make about their bosses in our 360-degree assessments zeros in on the quality of their meetings...our research on productivity improvement shows high correlation of improved productivity with the efficiency and effectiveness of meetings."

Stanford sociologist, Elizabeth Cohen, found when putting kids together and asking them to solve a problem, they often let one kid dominate while the others disengaged. Sound familiar? But when the teacher established group norms such as roles, goals, ground rules, etc. "not only will [the children] behave according to the new norms, but they will enforce rules on other group members. Even very young students can be heard lecturing to other members of the group on how they ought to be behaving."

Decades of Emotional Intelligence research shows that groups of leaders can be individually brilliant and a collective bunch of dim wits. In what's still one of the best books in the EQ field, *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman and his co-writers report, "Collective emotional intelligence is what sets top-performing teams apart from average teams...in some teams, contention and heated confrontation are the order of the day; in others a charade of civility and interest barely veils everyone's boredom. In still other, more effective teams, people listen to and question each other with respect, support each other in word and deed, and work through disagreements with openness and humor. Whatever the ground rules, people automatically sense them and tend to adjust how they behave accordingly."

We've facilitated dozens of team development sessions (often as part of a virtual or in-person leadership team **retreat**). We frequently use surveys and interviews to gather data and perceptions on team effectiveness.

Here's a typical survey you might want to use with your team:

- On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being "Totally Ineffective" and 10 "Highly Effective," rate our team's current level of effectiveness.
- On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being "Not at all important" and 10 being "Critically important," how important is it for our team to improve its effectiveness? Why?
- If you didn't score a 10, what do you think is holding our team back? Please provide specific examples.
- What are our team's biggest team accomplishments of the past 6 to 12 months?
- When our team is working well and the most effective, what factors have helped to make that happen?
- What are our team's three greatest strengths?
- How should/could those strengths be further leveraged to improve team effectiveness?
- To help increase team effectiveness, what should we (please provide three per category):
  - Keep Doing
  - Stop Doing or Reduce
  - Start Doing or Do More
- What else should we discuss to boost our team's effectiveness?
- Other comments/suggestions.

To see your team's true dynamics, survey participants must answer these questions without being identified. Their answers can then be anonymously compiled, and a summary report with data and key themes brought back to the team for discussion, learning, and action. If you can't use a neutral, third-party facilitator, you could post them in an online, anonymous survey tool like SurveyMonkey and compile the responses.

Is yours a scream team or a dream team? Are your meetings a PLO as Tom Peters outlines in his book, *The Excellence Dividend: Meeting the Tech Tide with Work That Wows and Jobs That Last*, "Every meeting that does not stir the imagination AND curiosity of attendees AND increase bonding AND cooperation AND engagement AND sense of worth AND motivate rapid action AND enhance enthusiasm is a PLO/Permanently Lost Opportunity."

How to Ensure Your Meetings Aren't Virtually Useless

You likely thought too many meetings were time-wasters before this pandemic. Now your "meeting fun" has likely moved online to a higher time-sucking level!

Steven Rogelberg, professor and author of the book, *The Surprising Science of Meetings: How You Can Lead Your Team to Peak Performance,* reports that 8 out of the average 23 hours a week leaders spend in meetings are unproductive. That's a day a week wasted! That truly sucks.

Rogelberg also cites research that shows, "some 90% of people report daydreaming in meetings, and 73% admit that they use meeting time to do other work." This book was published last year - before this year's explosion in virtual meetings. What do those numbers look like now when meeting participants are answering e-mails, looking after kids, or doing laundry while part of virtual meetings?

It gets worse. Rogelberg reports, "My research suggests that only around 50% of meeting time is effective, well used, and engaging -- and these effectiveness numbers drop even lower when it comes to remote meetings."

I continue to be astounded and mystified why so many leaders lead or participate in poorly run, wasteful meetings. They seem to feel they're an unavoidable cost of doing business. The only explanation seems to be ignorance. Meeting leaders don't know what they don't know. Or they know better but aren't doing better. They've developed sloppy meeting habits.

Meeting Effectiveness Checklist

Here's a summary of best practices for highly effective virtual or in-person meetings:

1. Clear agendas with timeframes, objectives, and desired outcomes for each agenda item. Check in to add/delete agenda items before the meeting starts.
2. **Ground rules** everyone agrees to and follows.
3. Conflict management fostering healthy **debates** and reducing dysfunctional arguments or participants **shutting down**.
4. **Clarity** about whether decisions/actions for each agenda item will be by command, consultation, or consensus.
5. Dealing constructively with **dysfunctional** team behaviors.
6. Clear action plans and next steps for each agenda item.
7. Documentation and communication follow-through for meeting attendees and those who didn't attend but are involved in next steps and action plans.
8. Skilled leaders that know how to keep things on track and focused.
9. An atmosphere of **openness** and **trust**.
10. Regular **evaluations** of meeting effectiveness.

How's your meeting leadership? Most meeting leaders are blissfully ignorant about how wasteful attendees feel their meetings are. How do you know what attendees think of your meetings?

Bridging the Distance: Reading, Leading, and Succeeding

Leaders bring hope, optimism, and positive action. That's really tough to do while social distancing and facing an uncertain future. We multiply misery if we allow the pessimism plague to infect us as well.

To counter Headline Stress Disorder and strengthen resilience, I actively scan a list of resources for research, articles, and tips on leading ourselves and others through these turbulent times. I post those articles every day.

Let's shorten our social media distancing. Follow or connect with me:

in **LinkedIn** and follow **The CLEMMER Group**
Twitter
f **Facebook**

Together we can Learn, Laugh, Love, and Lead -- just for the L of it!

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 his or her permission. I am also happy to explore customized, in-house adaptations (online these days) 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**!

Let's leverage our leadership strengths to work together and get through this challenging time.

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