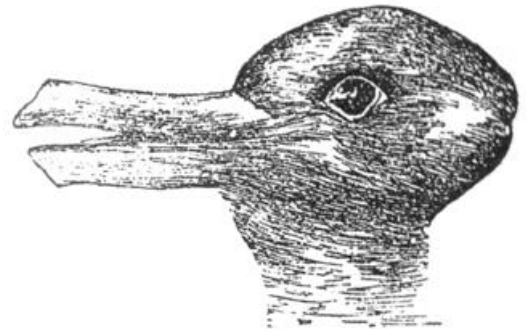




## Issue 187 - October 2018

What do you see in this drawing?

Tilt your head slightly to the left, and look at this drawing. Do you see the rabbit? It's facing to the right with its ears tilted horizontally behind its head on the left. Now tilt your head slightly to the right, and focus on the duck. It's gazing to the left with its long bill (what just looked like the rabbit's ears) partly open. Which view is "reality?" What we see depends on what we're looking for.



Our perception is our reality. In their book, *What the Bleep Do We Know!?*, William Arntz, Betsy Chasse and Mark Vicente explain, "The bottom line, at least as far as science has gone up till now, is this: We create the world we perceive. When I open my eyes, and look around, it is not 'the world' that I see, but the world my human sensory equipment is able to see, the world my belief system allows me to see, and the world that my emotions care about seeing or not seeing."

"Medical School Syndrome" is an example of the power of perception. Medicinenet.com describes it as "a form of acute hypochondriasis that affects most people in training to be a physician. For example, when studying Hodgkin disease, a medical student feels behind their ears or neck, feels little lymph nodes (that are entirely normal), and thinks they have Hodgkin disease."

It's all about perspective. Closing one eye and holding our thumb close enough can block out the moon at night. Today's news often blocks the bigger picture. Pessimistic preconceptions can especially distort reality. A cynical focus on overly negative current events burrows especially deep into our psyche tapping into our darkest fears. A series of studies at the University of Michigan found that "when misinformed people were exposed to accurate information in news stories, they rarely changed their minds. On the contrary, they often became even more strongly wedded to their beliefs. Far from curing misinformation, the facts were actively perpetuating it."

This issue features my review of, and quotes from, a highly inspiring and perspective changing new book. Steven Pinker's exhaustive research and extensive analysis helps readers pull their black thumbs of doom from blocking their eye to see the beauty of the moon – and universe – beyond. We're now living the enlightenment dream. To see it -- and change our reality, -- we need to change our perspective.

You'll also find my *Globe & Mail* column on dealing with a bad boss. Upward leadership is an example of perspective and choices. We can wallow in the crap he or she is dumping on us and be miserable. Or we can decide to act like a leader and change our reality.

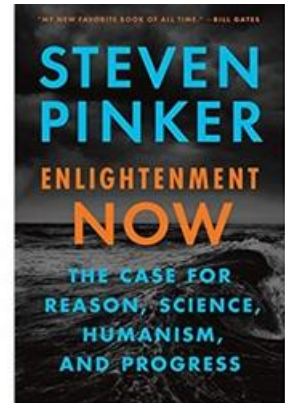
When you're deciding to hang a painting or photo on the wall, you're choosing a perspective. Depending upon the size and color of its frame or matting, the painting or photo can appear larger or smaller, brighter or darker, or imbued with certain colors or tones.

How are you framing turbulence, adversity, or changes in your life? Are you making them bigger or smaller? What color or tone are you accenting? What is the reality that the frames you're using create for you? How do the glasses you've chosen to wear manifest reality in your life?

## Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress

One of my favorite bedtime stories as a kid was the story of Chicken Little. It's a very old folk tale about a little chick who was hit on the head by a falling acorn. The chick believed the world was coming to an end, and set out to warn the King.

"Despair springs eternal," as social and mainstream media crank up their sky-is-falling examples and warnings of death, disaster, and destruction. But "news" rarely reports on all that's going right. ("I am reporting live from the airport as we watch the 89th plane today land safely" or "You're watching live a combine harvesting and threshing as much wheat in six minutes, as it took 25 men to do in one day 150 years ago.")



Harvard professor, researcher, and author Steven Pinker's new book, *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress*, is a highly inspiring read that brings a strong dose of reality to the truly fake news of negativity and cynical hand wringing all around us. We live in the best times in the history of the world. In over six dozen graphs, Pinker provides powerful data showing how the pioneering leaders of late 18th Century enlightenment thinking is here now. We truly are living the dream.

Health, wealth, safety, poverty, war, democracy, inequality, knowledge, quality of life, happiness, violence, and a long list of other conditions are on dramatic and progressive upward curves that show little sign of slowing down. Pinker notes, "In the year 2000, all 189 members of the United Nations, together with two dozen international organizations, agreed on eight Millennium Development Goals for the year 2015...And here is a shocker: The world has made spectacular progress in every single measure of human well-being. Here is a second shocker: Almost no one knows about it."

This book is chock-full of powerful data, quotes, and insights. I have filed over 130 of them in my digital research library. Here are a few points that especially stood out:

- We often mistake problems around us for how low the world has sunk, rather than how high our standards have risen.
- Rarely in history has well-being improved so dramatically, yet few people are aware of it.
- Bad things often happen quickly and often dramatically. Good things unfold gradually with little fanfare.
- Predicting the worst and end times has been the mark of prophets since Biblical times. Journalists and scholars are taken more seriously when they focus on what's wrong, and show these as symptoms of a sick society.
- Psychological research shows we dread losses more than enjoy gains, dwell on setbacks more than savor successes, and are stung more by criticism than heartened by praise. The English language has many more words for negative than positive emotions.
- Wealth is on a steady and dramatic rise across the world because of knowledge and cooperation. This has led to massive improvements in health and well-being around the globe.

- Wealth creation is a major outcome of the Enlightenment. It comes from countries and large groups of people combining ingenuity and labor in unforeseeable and highly creative ways. The steady march of progress shows we can continue creating more of it.

The rapid rise of populism today feeds off the dark side of human nature steeped in pessimistic wallowing. Following the well-worn path of ancient prophets of doom, cynical and manipulative leaders are capitalizing on fear and prejudice. They're determined to make the world unenlightened again, and take us back to a time when faith, dogma, authority, myopic ignorance, and gut feelings trumped science, humanism, reason, and science.

*Enlightenment Now* brings an uplifting context and perspective to just how far we've come. And the overwhelming odds are that progress will continue. Pinker opens the Progress section of his book with the words of Barack Obama:

"If you had to choose a moment in history to be born, and you did not know ahead of time who you would be -- you didn't know whether you were going to be born into a wealthy family or a poor family, what country you'd be born in, whether you were going to be a man or a woman -- if you had to choose blindly what moment you'd want to be born, you'd choose now."

To paraphrase Mark Twain, media reports of our demise have been greatly exaggerated. The sky isn't falling. It's just a few acorns.

## Thoughts That Make You Go Hmmm on...*Enlightenment Now*

Bill Gates calls this "my new favorite book of all time." Here's a small taste of Steven Pinker's forceful case for reframing where the world is today:

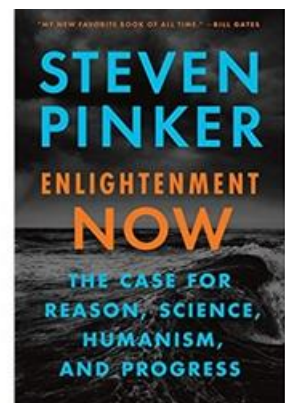
*"...although the world remains highly unequal, every region has been improving, and the worst-off parts of the world today are better off than the best-off parts not long ago."*

*"In almost every year from 1992 through 2015, an era in which the rate of violent crime plummeted, a majority of Americans told pollsters that crime was rising. In late 2015, large majorities in eleven developed countries said that 'the world is getting worse,' and in most of the last forty years, a solid majority of Americans have said that the country is 'heading in the wrong direction.'"*

*"We have already seen some dangerous misconceptions that arise from this statistical obtuseness. People think that crime and war are spinning out of control, though homicides and battle deaths are going down, not up. They think that Islamist terrorism is a major risk to life and limb, whereas the danger is smaller than that from wasps and bees."*

*"Since the Enlightenment unfolded in the late 18th century, life expectancy across the world has risen from 30 to 71, and in the more fortunate countries to 81. When the Enlightenment began, a third of the children born in the richest parts of the world died before their fifth birthday; today, that fate befalls 6 percent of the children in the poorest parts."*

*"Keep some perspective. Not every problem is a Crisis, Plague, Epidemic, or Existential Threat, and not every change is the End of This, the Death of That, or the Dawn of a Post-Something Era. Don't*



*confuse pessimism with profundity: problems are inevitable, but problems are solvable, and diagnosing every setback as a symptom of a sick society is a cheap grab for gravitas."*

*"The peace researcher John Galtung pointed out that if a newspaper came out once every fifty years, it would not report half a century of celebrity gossip and political scandals. It would report momentous global changes such as the increase in life expectancy."*

*"In The Idea of Decline in Western History, the historian Arthur Herman recounts two centuries of doomsayers who have sounded the alarm of racial, cultural, political, or ecological degeneration. Apparently, the world has been coming to an end for a long time indeed."*

*"When we fail to acknowledge our hard-won progress, we may come to believe that perfect order and universal prosperity are the natural state of affairs, and that every problem is an outrage that calls for blaming evil-doers, wrecking institutions, and empowering a leader who will restore the country to its rightful greatness."*

## 5 Ways to Deal with a Bad Boss

Bad bosses can be deadly. One 15-year study found that when employees had a difficult relationship with their boss, they were 30% more likely to suffer from heart disease. Perhaps really bad bosses have lower coronary disease because their hearts are seldom used!

If you have ever said, "My boss makes me sick!" you might be right. A British study found that stress induced by a bad boss lowers immune response, and participants were more susceptible to a cold virus.

As with much in life, it's not what happens to us, but what we do about it. A bad boss might victimize you, but you choose whether to be a victim. Strong leaders don't wait, they initiate. If you have a bad boss, you can decide he or she's not unbearable, and live with your situation, fire your boss by leaving, or practice upward leadership with some boss management.



Boss management or **leading upward** is one of the most popular topics on our web site. Recently *The Globe & Mail* published my column on **Five Ways to Deal with a Bad Boss** in their Leadership Labs section. I condensed years of writing and coaching on this topic into five steps:

1. **Strengthen your credibility and relationship**
2. **Check your timing and approach**
3. **Don't wait, initiate**
4. **Speak up**
5. **Fire a bully boss**

[Click here](#) to read the column for a brief description of each step.

A reporter once asked the Dalai Lama why he didn't hate the Chinese Communists. Now they were some bad bosses! The Dalai Lama replied, "They have taken over Tibet, destroyed our temples, burned our sacred texts, ruined our communities, and taken away our freedom. They have taken so much. Why should I let them also take my peace of mind?"

## 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:

**Practical how-to advice for upward leadership and strengthening the relationship with your boss.**

**"10 Ways to Get Your Boss to Trust You Completely"**

**Cleverism.com**

*"The most significant factor impacting your job satisfaction is your relationship with your boss, and how well he or she can count on you to deliver almost every single time."*

**Too many managers are "snoopervisors" overloading their schedules and driving their teams crazy.**

**Top Ten Reasons Why We Don't Delegate** -- Donald Cooper

*"Things don't get done, problems don't get solved, opportunities get missed, customers get frustrated and go elsewhere, talented, initiative-taking employees leave in frustration and the business slowly grinds to a halt."*

**Joe Folkman's research provides a range of options that combine with boldness to boost leadership effectiveness.**

**10 Behaviors That Make Being Bold a Virtue and Not a Vice** -- Joe Folkman

**Forbes.com**

*"Being bold is a great skill, but it's a bit like salt. By itself it's not very good but when mixed with the right foods it can make a huge difference."*

## 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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