



## Issue 223 - October 2021



When he spotted his grandpa asleep on the family room couch, the rambunctious ten-year-old saw his chance. With cat-like stealth, Lucas quietly crept up on grandpa and gently smeared a small bit of smelly old cheese into his moustache. As grandpa mumbled and stirred, Jason bolted from the room.

Peeking around the corner, Lucas fought hard to contain himself as he watched grandpa open his eyes and take a sniff of the air. "Whew! This room stinks", grandpa exclaimed. Rising from the couch, he went into the front hall. "The house stinks," grandpa declared as he went out the front door into the yard. Watching grandpa take a few deep whiffs of the air, Lucas lost it. He burst out laughing as grandpa bellowed, "The whole world stinks."

Our principles, values, or beliefs are the lens through which we see the world. We then find the evidence and examples to prove our point of view. If our behavior sometimes smells a little -- we fudge the numbers, cut ethical corners, or stretch the truth -- we assume (and often justify our behavior with) "everybody else is doing it." Then we notice just how many other people are doing the same -- their behavior stinks.

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If people with this mindset become managers, he or she will build on their assumptions and experiences by putting rules and practices in place to catch the "stinkers." As psychologist and personal effectiveness coach, Peter Jensen, puts it, "Most of what we see in others is what we project from ourselves."

We don't see -- or smell -- the world as it is. There is no objective reality. We see -- and sniff test -- the world as we are.

The first blog in this issue started with a request to contribute to a leadership book on boosting productivity and reducing turnover. My next blog answered a question on motivational techniques. I then had a request for a magical makeover to transform a team in one or two wondrous workshops into highly trusted leaders. By my fourth blog, it was clear the emerging issue in those first three blogs were the behaviors and organizational culture reflecting the true core values of the leaders.

Values, like weather, are much talked about. Unlike weather, much can be done to turn talk about values into action. With awareness and determined effort, values can move from good intentions to sustained implementation. New habits and cultural norms can be locked in.

Values determine how leaders deal with today's chaos and uncertainty. As 19th century Spanish author, Carlos Reyles put it, "Principles are to people what roots are to trees. Without roots, trees fall when they are thrashed with the winds of the pampas. Without principles, people fall when they are shaken by the gales of existence."

May this issue help to deepen your roots.


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# How Leaders Can Boost Productivity and Reduce Turnover



I was recently asked to contribute to a new leadership book. The author first asked how leaders can boost productivity "apart from salary increases."

Numerous studies show that money can demotivate, but rarely does it motivate. The highest productivity levels come from a good balance of management and leadership. Management is planning, organizing, controlling, strategies, technologies, etc. It's the intellectual, rational, and headspace. Leadership is feelings, inspiration, values, caring, etc. It's the emotional or heart space.

Many organizations are techno-managed. "Human resources" are factors of production. They're **dehumanized with AI, automation, and technical optimization** to increase productivity.

Decades of research find the most productive and effective organizations connect the heart, head, and hands of people to focus on their larger purpose of serving their customers, communities, and society. This means developing both leaders and organizational culture. The two create upward or downward reinforcing spirals. Highly effective organizations **make people stronger for organizations and organizations stronger for people.**

The goldfish analogy illustrates the impact of people-centered values focused on growth and development. If you buy a little goldfish and keep it in a small bowl, it will grow a few inches for the rest of its life. Move that same fish to a large aquarium, and it will double or triple in size. Put the goldfish in a large pond, and it can grow up to a foot long. The key factor determining the size of the fish is the size of its environment.

Less effective managers see people as they are and treat them according to

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what they see. He or she would take a small goldfish and keep it in the little bowl because it would be inefficient and wasteful to put it in a larger environment. Strong leaders see people as they could be and coach them to grow their potential.

Leaders provide a bigger environment by delegating autonomy. Strong leaders are strong coaches (see **chart** for illustration of coaching's impact). They clarify performance targets, develop skills and abilities, reinforce progress, and build on strengths.

### **MANAGEMENT (SMALL FISHBOWLS)**

Commanding

Solving problems

Directing and controlling

Seeing people as they are

Empowering

Operating

Pushing

Heroic manager

Quick fix to symptoms

### **LEADERSHIP (LARGE FISH TANKS)**

Coaching

Enabling others to solve problems

Teaching and engaging

Developing people into what they could be

Partnering

Improving

Pulling

Facilitative leader

Search for systemic root causes

Are you a small fishbowl manager or large fish tank leader? How do you know? You can use this **Fish Tank Factor** mini quiz for a quick self-assessment

### **What's the best way for an employer to lower employee turnover?**

In three words, strengthen leader effectiveness. Many studies of turnover and engagement show that people join an organization and quit their boss. Some quit and leave. Many others quit and stay. They disengage and reduce their efforts.

Research on attracting and retaining people shows that 60% - 70% of the time people quit is because of their immediate boss. Zenger Folkman has a database of over 125,000 leaders assessed by over 1 million direct reports, bosses, peers, and others. This **chart** shows the impact of leadership on

employee engagement and turnover.

Many leaders keep searching for programs and systems to increase productivity and reduce turnover. Some of them are helpful. But leaders can find the biggest factor by looking in the mirror.

## Stop Bribing and Starting Leading



An author writing a book on motivational techniques asked for my thoughts:

**How do you feel about increased Personal Time Off as an incentive? Flextime? Job sharing? Work from home? Employer-sponsored socializing (BBQs, bowling, game night, etc.)? Are there any hidden drawbacks to these incentives?**

If these approaches are used to "empower" people, they can be effective. If they're used to "motivate" or "incentivize," those manipulative approaches can backfire. Many managers need to stop bribing and start leading. As Alfie Kohn so powerfully shows in his book, *Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise, and Other Bribes*, whenever managers say, "do this, and you'll get that," they are moving from implicit or internal motivation to explicit or external motivation.

Bribing people to perform turns them into mercenaries. It degrades and demeans work. It sets a vicious, self-perpetuating cycle into motion -- incentives, inducements, rewards, and the like leave people feeling manipulated and overly focused on what they get for complying with management's goals and direction (tuned only to WIFM -- "what's in it for me").

Here's a summary of the difference between management push and leadership pull:

### ***Manipulative Management***

- Lead with to manipulate, control, and direct behavior
- Do it **to** employees to push motivational buttons
- Paternalistic pats on the head
- Management decides who gets rewarded and recognized for meeting their goals
- Assumes performance problems are from lazy, unmotivated, and uncaring people

### ***Empartnering Leadership***

- Follow with to support organizational change and improvement
- Do it **with** people to meet shared goals
- Participative, respectful partnerships
- Customer input helps leaders and partners decide who and how to reward and recognize
- Collaboratively aligns systems, structures, and processes to serve the servers and strengthen teamwork

Here's three key reasons team members need to be empartnered:

- They're the experts in the work within their areas and have deep insight into the effectiveness of cross-functional or organization-wide processes. Their understanding of what does and doesn't work is better than most managers and outside experts.
- Empartnerment generates greater energy and engagement. Most people want more from their jobs than just a paycheck. We want to be part of an organization with a meaningful purpose, feel like our work makes a difference, and contribute to a winning team.
- Frontline teams have ultimate implementation power. Too often, they're

asked to execute plans they know won't work. Some even engage in "malicious compliance" and implement what they know are irrelevant approaches. Good -- even great -- strategies poorly executed wastes everyone's time, squanders money, and gives the disengagement cycle another downward spin.

Empartnerment calls for a leader shift. Good managers often empower. Great leaders empartner. [Click here](#) for a chart showing the difference. You might also want to use this 10 point checklist for a [leadership checkup](#).

## A Trust Cause: Leadership Stimulates or Stifles Trust and Engagement



Recently, I was asked if I could deliver an online workshop for executive team leaders to "relearn/develop trust and empowerment in his/her team members when the team members feel they are not getting the trust or empowerment from their leader to do their jobs. How does a team lift this message upward, have the message heard, and get traction to move forward, to avoid the sense of being micro-managed and the feelings of lack of trust in the team members from their leader."

As I explored their objectives for the session, it was clear they came to the wrong guy. They wanted a magical makeover to transform leaders in one or two wondrous workshops. Sorry. I haven't yet found that magic wand.

Trust is a broad symptom of deeper leadership/culture issues. Empowerment comes from a set of values and leadership behaviors that form the team/organization culture (what's acceptable and rewarded and what's unacceptable and not tolerated). Trust thrives in a culture that's beyond empowerment to **"empartnerment."**

In this month's *Working Knowledge* post, Harvard Business School professor Emeritus, James Heskett, raises a key question, **Can We Train for Trust?** He writes, "Trust is, as it is for many things in society, the bedrock for employee engagement. A culture that fosters trust reduces what academics call transactional 'friction.' As a result, decisions are made and implemented faster and at lower cost, something critical in an age where speed takes on greater and greater value." He quotes Airbnb co-founder and CEO, Brian Chesky, "things move at the speed of trust." Especially true for his company. Trust is at the core of an automated app or website connecting property owners with renters they've never met.

Heskett cites research showing the positive financial impact of increasing trust through higher employee engagement. He also shows that "organizations apparently are doing a poor job of building positive employee experiences, whether through trust or other means."

Based on research Sandra Sucher and Shalene Gupta's new book, *The Power of Trust*. "Trust is something you can get better at," Sucher says in **Good News for Disgraced Companies: You Can Regain Trust**. "For companies that want to take this seriously, it can be done." The authors report that effective companies focus on four elements to build trust; competence, motive, means, and impact.

The dilemma is -- as the saying goes -- we can't solve a problem with the same thinking that created it. There is no quick and simple approach to building a high trust, partnering culture.

You can find a range of articles and blogs I've written on **Engagement and Empowerment**, and **Trust**. In our leadership and culture development work, we find that trust and empowerment are highly intertwined. Trust me.



## Mind the Gap: Are Your Values Rhetoric or Reality?



It's easy to spout motherhood statements about caring for people, teamwork, trust, partnering, we're all in this together, and the like. Tough times expose a leadership team's true values. When the pandemic panic set in last year, some executive teams showed their true beliefs that employees are **human capital** or assets with skin to be shed when the going got tough.

As leaders now rebuild or focus on growth opportunities, attracting, engaging, and retaining top people -- a magnet organization -- will make or break their plans. Central to the magnetic strength of an organization's culture are its values.

Most organizations today have some sort of values statement. One test of whether those values are just words somewhere on a website or vibrantly alive is to ask anyone what the values are and how they're used. If they can't do it without looking them up, they're likely a lengthy list of values or don't reflect what behaviors are truly expected and rewarded.

Countless studies show that organizations with "high standards of ethical behavior," "shared values," or are "socially conscious" have higher than average performance. **Values-based leadership has huge pay-offs.**

If your leadership team hasn't developed an explicit set of core values or they need to be revitalized, you want:

- Three to five words or short phrases you can use as "verbal pegs" to cluster or summarize your desired culture.
- Words or short phrases that are easy to understand and meaningful to your team and organization.
- Definitions of the core behaviors to live your core values. Sometimes adding examples of behaviors that violate your values can be helpful.

Your values should represent a **blend** of those principles from your past that you want to preserve and the beliefs that your organization needs to live by to strengthen your culture. Drawing from the past respects and builds on your organization's heritage, successes, and strengths. It helps to turn resistance to change into confidence and energy for facing the future. Future values are the flipside of your team or organization's vision.

### **From Rhetoric to Reality**

Values live most clearly in key people's decisions:

- Make "values fit" a key criterion in hiring. You can improve a person's skills and experience with training and development. It's very hard to train for attitude and almost impossible to change a person's core values.
- Replace rules and policies with values and trust. Effective leaders treat team members as responsible adults who want to do the right thing for the team or organization. They know that most people will exercise good judgment with good support, training, and leadership examples. The exceptions can be dealt with as needed.
- Promote only those people who are role models for the organization's values. Promotions are the clearest indication of whether values are rhetoric or reality. Too often, executive teams declare values of teamwork, safety, customer service, or trust, but then promote techno-managers, who manage by e-mail, rarely sees customers or team members, prioritize production over safety, and "snoopervise."— simply because he or she gets the job done. This clearly shows what's expected and rewarded -- despite the values statement.

Many executive teams have "done their values thing" and produced aspiration statements. Some are quite inspiring. But many executives are frustrated that managers, supervisors, and employees aren't getting the message.

Most people do get the executive team's message. They see it loud and clear.

# 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:

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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](mailto: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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