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Does a retreat help a leadership team advance? Or does a retreat mean falling behind as work piles up back at the office?

We worked with a CEO to plan and run an offsite leadership and culture development session. He refused to call it a retreat. He insisted everyone refer to the session as an 'advance.'

The CEO was right, the reason for taking any leadership team offsite for two-days is to advance. We can debate terms and change words, but there's now lots of evidence that in today's frantic and crazy-busy times, stepping back helps us to step ahead. It's the pause that refreshes, renews, and refocuses.



Fall is a popular time for **leadership team retreats**. Leadership teams need time away from daily operations and everyday distractions to work together in planning and strategy, reflection and renewal, team building, and development planning. This time away carves out space for the collaboration and planning so vital to increasing safety, service/quality improvement, leadership, or culture development.

In over four decades, we've seen too much time, money, and effort wasted on the 50-70% of leadership, culture, and organization change and development efforts that fail. Here are some of the key failure factors:

- The team isn't united in strategic priorities
- Conflicting messages ripple out to the organization
- Behaviors don't model the desired culture or values
- Little personal feedback on leadership behaviors
- It's not safe to discuss moose-on-the-table (touchy or politically sensitive topics)

A leadership team retreat is an excellent way to ensure you're pulling together and focused on a shared strategy to boost the success of your development efforts. Effective offsite sessions are tailored to your organization's culture, team dynamics, development needs, strategic issues, and priorities to make the most of this valuable time together. To review retreat resources, click on **leadership team retreats** and the links under "Planning a Retreat?"

Envisioning your team or organization's desired future is a critical step in a leadership team retreat. This issue provides new research, some examples, and links to harnessing the magnetic power of visualization. You'll also find suggestions to increase participation and autonomy. This is a core value that's a cornerstone of most high-performing cultures. Leaders need to debate and decide if doing it with and not to or for people in their organization is a priority. Performance reviews are a culture outcropping that shows the values and approaches of the leadership team and the culture they want to build. Follow the link in this issue to a webinar showing essential performance elements in building a coaching culture.

I hope this issue gives you a brief personal retreat so you can advance your leadership effectiveness.

In Your Dreams: Leaders See It to Be It

A senior leader was determined to strengthen her organization's culture. She recognized that getting her executive team to work together more effectively was a key first step. In preparation for an offsite **leadership team retreat** I interviewed each executive with a series of team and organization assessment questions and ratings.

It became clear that a major cause of the executive team's struggles with each other and building their culture were disjointed views of what they were aiming for. Teamwork and culture are general terms with a broad range of meanings. It was as if the executives were putting together a giant jigsaw puzzle, with each leader working on a different color -- some green, some brown, others blue, and so on. Each team had a different image of what the finished puzzle should look like.



The team had a vision statement but not a shared vision. "Imagineering" is a vital element in bringing teams and organizations together. Envisioning our desired future together is one of the most powerful elements of team building and culture development.

Andrew Carton, assistant professor of management at The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, found that "visions with image-based words are more consistent with the literal meaning of the word 'vision.'" He and his research associates discovered that when leaders use vivid images, they transport people to the future and make stronger emotional connections. "We determined that a vision communicated via image-laden words ('our toys...will make wide-eyed kids laugh and proud parents smile') triggered stronger performance than a vision with similar content but without visual wording ('our toys...will be enjoyed by all of our customers'). We found that image-based words have a galvanizing influence -- they inspire people to work together toward the same crystal-clear snapshot of the future."

But many executives are **informing (head-based goals and targets) rather than communicating (heart-based images and feelings)**. Carton reports, "my co-authors and I have found that more than 90% of leaders communicate visions without any image-based words."

During their offsite retreat, the executive team of an international mining company were debating and describing the culture they wanted to build. Their **silent envisioning and clustering exercise** showed strong alignment across key themes. The team also described the behaviors they needed to model to **move from passionate lip service to involved leadership**. A key component of that culture meant putting safety front and center. Rather than using a target like "zero harm," they headed their culture shift as "work safe, home safe." That paints a clearer and more compelling picture of what the company is shooting for.

Management is seeing things as they are. Leadership is seeing what could be. As the pioneering French psychologist, Emile Coue, observed, "Imagery may be the highest form of mental energy we have. Reason can analyze and organize, but only imagination can create. It is through imagination that we create the future -- ours and the world's."

Are You Doing it – To – For - or – With - Your Team?

Many studies have shown the impact that control of our situation has on our health, happiness, and effectiveness. In one experiment a white-footed deer mouse was placed in a brightly lit cage. The mouse could press a bar to alter the light. The mouse reduced the lighting to a dim level. The next morning experimenters set the lights to dim. The mouse immediately stepped up the lighting to bright. The mouse didn't seem to care about its level of lighting. The critical issue was having control.



Another autonomy and control experiment was in a nursing home. One floor of residents were allowed to rearrange their room layout, schedule their time, and given a plant to keep and look after. Another floor of residents were told about all the good things being done for them. The staff arranged their room, scheduled their time, and gave them a plant that the nurse looked after. Eighteen months later, the residents on the floor with more control were more active and healthier than their controlled peers. Only 15 percent on the control floor died compared to 30 percent on the other floor.

Countless organizational studies show that autonomy, participation, "having some say," and a modicum of control in the workplace are vital to employee engagement. Here are a few ways you can engage your work teams:

- Develop a regular Listen-Feedback-Action process. This generally starts with a survey or third-party interviews or focus groups. The outside company then prepares a summary report. This is reported back to everyone in the organization for feedback, clarification, priority-setting, and action planning. Broader organizational issues are identified, and actions set for implementing those changes. This is reported back to everyone and part of an ongoing process.
- Coach team members to enrich their jobs and align their personal strengths, passions, and organizational or job needs.
- Engage frontline service providers in a systematic process of identifying changing customer expectations against your team or organization's performance. Get their help in analyzing trends and planning to meet those shifting needs.
- Hold regular breakfasts ("muffins with management"), lunches, and celebration dinners with frontline teams. Take this time to ask for feedback, concerns, and suggestions. A simple question such as: "What's the dumbest thing we do around here?" can produce powerful insights and engage people in resolving the issues raised.
- Keep highly visible scoreboards, big thermometers (like a fundraising campaign), bulletin boards, web sites, blog/Twitter posts, newsletters, and the like to update everyone on your progress toward key goals or change and improvement targets. Make goals/targets and progress as visible as possible.
- To get partnering behavior, treat everyone like partners. Share financial and other "confidential" information openly so everyone can see how his or her efforts contribute.
- Ask frontline service providers what systems and processes would better help them serve your customers. Get their involvement in prioritizing the areas to be changed and improving them.
- Send personal thank you notes (on real notepaper, not by e-mail); make detours to offer a verbal "thanks again," and make lots of supportive phone calls.
- Use focus groups (a cross-section of frontline staff) to test new management directions before making grand announcements to everyone. Even if you press on against the advice of the focus groups, you'll have deeper insight on how to face the issues the new direction may raise.
- Promote those people who are exemplary leaders. Use 360 feedback and other input from a variety of people to get a profile on their leadership effectiveness. Promotions send the clearest signals about the true culture of an organization. Are you promoting your cultural standard barriers?

Resistance to change often frustrates managers. But most of us enjoy change -- especially for the better. What we resist is being changed. Effective leaders "do it with" their team or organization rather than doing it to or for them.

Webinar: What to Do About the Performance Review?

What's your experience with performance reviews? How energizing and helpful are they -- to give or receive? Do you look forward to performance discussions with excitement or dread? Do performance reviews in your organization boost, block, or befuddle effectiveness?

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.



Many organizations mandate that managers must complete performance reviews with their direct reports as a way to force some type of coaching conversation. But those discussions often do more harm than good. Zenger Folkman's research shows:

- Managers that are mediocre at feedback and coaching have employee engagement scores 20 points below the average.
- Managers that 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 provides 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.

Improving a manager's coaching effectiveness involves shifting mindsets (often embedded in organizational culture) and building skillsets. In a recent webinar, **What to Do About the Performance Review?** ZF Vice President, Jared Harding showed how management styles impact these important vital conversations. Watch to learn:

- The main predictor of effective coaching conversations
- Key differences between autocratic and laissez-faire leadership styles/mindsets (with video examples) and their impact on performance management
- How collaborative leaders regularly coach team members toward forward-looking objectives
- Assess your preferred management/coaching style by receiving an individual report
- The impact of perceived control and influence on work environments and results
- Three steps to choosing the most effective leadership mindset
- How coachee feedback helps improve a leader's coaching style

Click [here](#) to watch this webinar now.

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:

Do the most effective leaders push for results, inspire through pulling, or balance both? What's your preference?

"Attitudes And Beliefs Impact How We Motivate Others" -- Joe Folkman

<https://www.forbes.com>

"Attitudes and beliefs can be very powerful forces that impact how we behave. Have you ever considered that some of your attitudes and beliefs might be incorrect?"

All age groups want effective leadership - "generational differences are small to near-zero."

"A Study of 600,000 People Shows the Secret to Managing Millennials Is to Quit Thinking of Them as Millennials"-- Jeff Haden

<https://www.inc.com>

"Age differences are only a small slice of what makes each individual different. To lead, you must first take the time to truly know the person and then adapt how you lead to the interests, needs, and goals of that individual."

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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