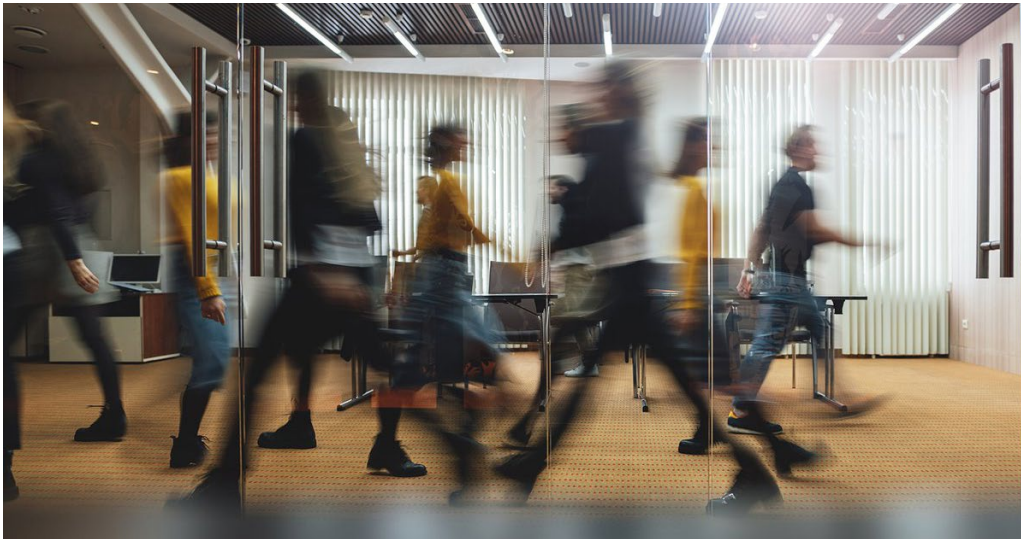




Issue 210 - September 2020



In 1891, the Anglo-Irish playwright and author, Oscar Wilde, wrote, "We live in the age of the overworked, and the under-educated; the age in which people are so industrious that they become absolutely stupid."

Over 100 years later, the tradition of industrious stupidity continues. During these times of crisis and frantic change, we can get caught running flat out with our heads down. We can race down dead-end roads and right over a cliff. We can be too busy running to watch the signs or stop and look at a map.

In **"Need Speed? Slow Down,"** Jocelyn Davis and Tom Atkinson report, "In our study of 343 businesses (conducted with the Economist Intelligence Unit), the companies that embraced initiatives and chose to go, go, go to try to gain an edge ended up with lower sales and operating profits than those that paused at key moments to make sure they were on the right track. What's more, the firms that "slowed down to speed up" improved their top and bottom lines, averaging 40% higher sales and 52% higher operating profits over a three-year period."

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Up**

We often find managers and their teams are so busy working in the business that they have little time to work *on* the business. That often means:

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

In his book, *Overcoming the Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, Patrick Lencioni writes, "...one of the most challenging obstacles that prevents teams from taking the time to work on how they work together: adrenaline addiction. Many, if not most of the executives and managers I know, have become so hooked on the rush of urgent demands and out-of-control schedules that the prospect of slowing down to review, think, talk, and develop themselves is too anxiety-inducing to consider. Of course, this is exactly what they need, which is what addiction is all about doing things that are bad for you even when confronted with evidence that they are, well, bad for you."

This issue starts with a look at zooming out to see where you're going. If you keep doing what you're doing, you'll end up where you're headed. Is that what you want? Is it time to step back and change direction?

Disruptive technologies are stressing, distressing, and misdirecting many teams and organizations. On the other hand, innovative technology has brought huge advances to our lives. Like fire or water, technology can sustain and enhance life. Or it can bring death and destruction. We look at how companies rushing to leverage breakthrough technologies can lose their way.

Do you work for a bully boss? Is it time to reassess your approach and relationship with your boss? Are you a bully boss? How do you know? Are you me-deep in fooling yourself about your leadership effectiveness? Is this the time to step back and truly pinpoint the blinking blue dot that shows "you are here?" This issue looks at both sides of the boss issue.

Are you taking care of busyness and hurting your business by working overtime? Take our **Mind Your Own Busyness quiz** to pinpoint where you are. As life speeds up, the value of slowing down is even more critical. May this issue give you pause.



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Zoom Out to See Where You're Going



A really helpful feature of Google Maps is the ability to zoom in and out. Often pulling back to see the bigger picture gives a better sense of where we are now and where we're going.

In these crazy times, it's so easy to get stuck at street view. We rush from one task to another, tethered to our smartphones, trying to stay on top of a torrent of messages, while juggling meetings and phone calls. If we don't zoom out, we may be heading in the wrong direction to the wrong destination.

Our **executive coaching** work shows that many leaders are too busy working *in* their leadership roles to zoom out periodically and work *on* their leadership. Their blue dot is blinking so fast it's become a strobe light as they get lost in dealing with daily issues and concerns.

In their classic five year study (**Beware the Busy Manager**) of hundreds of managers at a dozen large companies, Heike Bruch and Sumantra Ghosal reported, "Our findings on managerial behavior should frighten you: Fully 90% of managers squander their time in all sorts of ineffective activities. In other words, a mere 10% of managers spend their time in a committed, purposeful, and reflective manner."

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Sounding way too familiar? So how do you leader shift to extraordinary leadership? Harvard Business School professor, Joseph Badaracco, studied classic works and interviewed 100 managers in 15 countries to learn how busy men and women find time for reflection. In **Reflection: The Pause That Brings Peace and Productivity**, Dina Gerdeman summarizes his "four design principles for a calmer, more productive life."

Aim for Good Enough -- find reflective time and an enjoyable approach that fits into your life. That could be exercising, cooking, commuting.... Some leaders write out their thoughts. Others talk things through with people they trust.

Downshift Occasionally -- by daydreaming, taking a break, slowing down, connecting with nature, or a walk. Celebrate progress or develop gratitude lists/habits to "escape the psychic prison of continuous improvement."

Ponder Your Hard Issues -- step back and look at the issue from different perspectives. That may involve envisioning the consequences of going down different paths. Some leaders doodled their thoughts, looked at their own emotional barriers, or talked out loud with themselves.

Pause and Measure Up -- look at how the actions and likely outcomes align with what you and others expect. You could look at what your professional role models might do, what legacy you want to leave, or consistency with your personal values.

"Without reflection, we drift," Badaracco observes. "Others shape and direct us. With reflection, we can understand and even bend the trajectories of our lives."

17th century English poet, Edward Young, said, "they only babble who practice not reflection." Yoda, the funny little Star Wars philosopher and teacher, would like how he phrased that sentence. So, as Yoda might say, babble, do not. Reflection guide you, it will, if you pause to see where going you are.

Dehumanizing with AI, Automation, and Technical Optimization



In the early 1900s, Frederick Taylor, used "Scientific Management" principles to make the new production lines more efficient. Workers became cogs in the machine; shut off their minds, shut their mouths, and did what engineers and managers told them to do. The **factory scene** from Charlie Chaplin's 1936 movie, *Modern Times* satirizes that dehumanizing tyranny of mechanization.

Over the next few decades, leading companies and human performance researchers found that empowering workers to use their heads, hearts, and hands significantly boosted morale and productivity. This human relations movement focused on the psychological and social needs of workers. When workers felt they and their work mattered, and were involved in workplace decisions, performance skyrocketed.

In 1960, MIT management professor, Douglas McGregor's book, *The Human Side of Enterprise*, outlined the opposing motivational approaches of Theory X and Theory Y. While he didn't say it this way, the essence of Theory X beliefs is that people are lazy, will rip you off, need to be "snoopervised," and must be threatened and coerced. Theory Y approaches are based on opposing beliefs; people are self-motivated and self-controlled, want to take pride in their work, be on a winning team, and can be trusted.

We now have decades of evidence that treating people like humans, not technology -- so-called **soft skills** -- builds a much healthier, safer, engaged, service-oriented, higher quality, and profitable culture. BUT...many of today's fastest-growing tech firms have regressed to using artificial intelligence, algorithms, and machine-learning optimization to throw us back to those dehumanizing times.

Last year, I facilitated a planning retreat with a back-to-the-future technology colossus. The company was growing so rapidly they were having big problems finding people to staff their production facilities. They had a massive turnover problem. Costs were soaring and projected to get worse.

The planning session centered on processes, metrics, and systems. Plans to reduce their horrendous engagement and retention problem focused on better hiring/orientation practices and HR systems. The division leader who hired me woke up a few months prior, and realized their management-leadership **balance** was way out of whack. After seeing me deliver an industry conference keynote on leadership and culture, he brought me in to help rebalance their leadership practices and organizational culture with stronger people principles.

The division leader's new boss came from head office to join our session. After our discussion on providing more effective people leadership, the boss got up and strongly denounced the discussion. He said technical and analytical skills were the key to career advancement at their company. He went so far as to state, "you can be a complete a-hole as long as you're the smartest person in the room."

Throughout the session, it became very clear he was a quintessential **bully boss**. The division leader confirmed this in follow up conversations with me after the retreat. He quit after a few more months of dealing with autocratic and tyrannical behavior. He said, "Life's too short to live in such a toxic culture no matter how much money they throw at me."

In the 1950s, American writer, Kurt Vonnegut's first novel, *Player Piano: America in the Coming Age of Electronics*, showed the negative impact technology can have on quality of life. His depiction of how automation can dehumanize is both a look back and a look forward. He writes, "If it weren't for the people, the god-damn people always getting tangled up in the machinery...the world would be an engineer's paradise."

Many tech firms are succeeding -- for now. We'll see what happens when they lose their technological edge.

Do You Work for a Bully Boss? Are You One?



One of my favorite historical fiction authors is Colleen McCullough. She masterfully weaves extensive research with real and imagined characters to bring an historical period alive. Her five book, Masters of Rome, series is outstanding. In Book 3, *Fortune's Favorites*, she describes a scene in the Roman senate when the dictator Sulla asked for any objections to his proposal. Ofella spoke up in opposition to Sulla's plans. Without saying a word, Sulla motioned to his henchmen waiting at the doors. They carried Ofella out to the courtyard and sliced off his head. Sulla turned back to the senate and asked, "Are there any other comments?" There was no further opposition from the floor.

Few bully bosses immediately kill others like that. Their autocratic behavior is (usually) a *bit* more subtle. Some can quote the latest management book leader-speak. Sometimes the boss appears to invite discussion on a course of action that he or she has already decided on.

Bully bosses often intimidate their team into silence and take that as agreement. When he or she asks for honest feedback, everyone knows they're really demanding agreement. Dictatorial bosses often come across with variations of "all those opposed, say 'I resign.'"

Working for a bully boss can be terrifying -- like living with a creature from the black lagoon. If we allow ourselves to be a victim of a horrible boss, we could even end up in an early grave.

Some bad bosses are bad people. Their personal relationships are a disaster, they're miserably unhappy, and their values are evil. They want to dominate and bully people under them.

But most bad bosses don't mean it. They are good people doing a bad job. Many are blissfully ignorant of the dead, wounded, or stressed-out bodies they leave in their wake. They even think they're good examples of leadership and don't realize this **fatal flaw** is overshadowing their strengths.

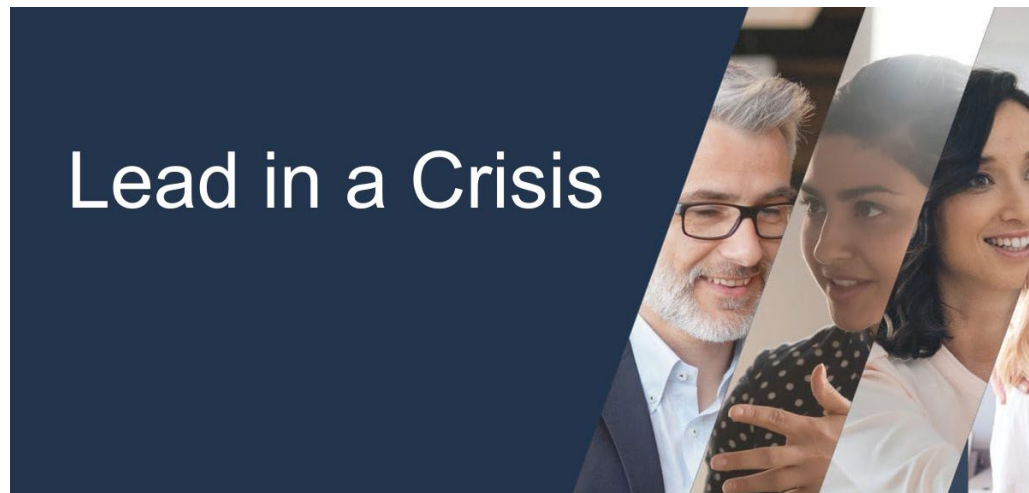
Are you a bully boss making life miserable for everyone on your team? Do people have to tip toe around you and avoid speaking their truth? How do you know? Are you **me-deep in fooling yourself**? If you were promoted because of your technical expertise, you might be in the ranks of a bright professional who's fallen into the **techno-manager** trap.

Are you working for a bully boss? You likely won't have your head sliced off, but it can be just as deadly. Studies show, people stressed out by bad bosses have higher rates of sickness, heart attacks, injuries, and death. You might need **strategies to deal with a bad boss**. Boss management or **upward leadership** could make a huge difference in your health and well-being.

The "take-charge boss" has long been associated with the military. "Well," snarled the tough old sergeant to the fearful private. "I suppose after you get discharged, you'll just be waiting for me to die so you can come and spit on my grave."

"Not me, Sarge!" the private replied. "Once I get out of the Army, I'm never going to stand in line again!"

Lead in a Crisis



Our strategic partner, Zenger Folkman, is offering a series of research-based micro-learning opportunities on key leadership capabilities during times of crisis. Jack Zenger and Joe Folkman will be facilitating these six live, interactive virtual sessions. You can find [full details here](#)

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 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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