

# Jim Clemmer's Leader Letter



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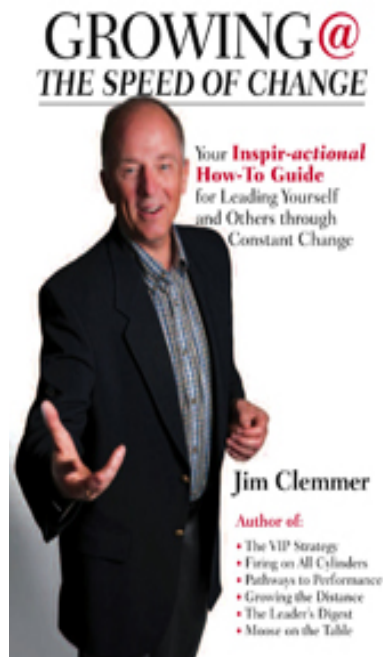
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## DECEMBER 2009, ISSUE 81



Did you ever believe in Santa Claus? If so, how real was "the jolly old elf" to you as a kid? For much of the Western World the upcoming Holiday Season is a time of fantasy, magic, and myths. Depending on our attitudes and belief systems, it's a time of year when the thin line between reality and illusion can disappear – especially for kids.

Movies, books, and fables often remind us this time of year how dangerous it is to lose our sense of awe, wonder, and possibilities. As we "grow up" and "face reality" we can suffocate our inner child with our ossified beliefs and perceptions of "the real world." This month's issue explores the very subjective, elusive, and fast changing concepts of reality, dreams, illusions, and perceptions.

Take the time this Holiday Season to reassess, refocus, and re-frame your reality.

## **GROWING @ THE SPEED OF CHANGE WEBCAST ON DECEMBER 3<sup>RD</sup> (NO CHARGE TO JOIN IN)**

Are you or your team struggling with constant changes in leadership, direction, and priorities? Are customers, other departments, or senior management demanding more and more from you? Are the pressures of life squeezing the joy from your day?

Join us online December 3rd from 1:30 – 2:30 Eastern Standard Time (5:00 GMT) for sixty minutes to recharge, refocus, and re-energize. This is the first time I've delivered a complimentary webcast in a few years. We don't have any others planned.

Drawing from my new book, [Growing @ The Speed Of Change: Your](#)

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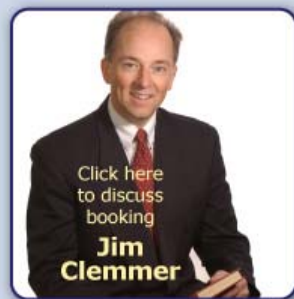
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[\*Inspir-actional How-To Guide for Leading Yourself and Others through Constant Change\*](#), I'll outline concrete how-to solutions that combine inspiration with practical action plans – something we call "inspir-action." This practical presentation, takes the tools of personal growth and development and applies them, so individuals and teams can deal with, and thrive in, a culture of constant change.

We currently have over 700 people registered (and only 1000 spots are available). Many are assembling teams in a meeting room or broadcasting the presentation to a large group to:

- Get practical approaches for improving morale, increase engagement, and boost energy.
- Foster a culture of continuous growth by developing shared leadership approaches.
- Reinforce a desired workplace culture with key messages and approaches that encourage positivity, team work, and a "can-do" spirit.
- Encourage personal commitment to organizational change and improvement efforts.

This complimentary webcast will cover:

- Thriving in Turbulent Times
- Shifting Perceptions: Seeing Beyond the Obstacles to the Opportunities
- Change Choices: Lead, Follow, or Wallow
- Wallow Words: Ten Popular Excuses for Avoiding Personal Change
- Everyone Must Lead: Leadership is an Action, Not a Position
- Nine Steps to Personal Leadership
- Using this Book to Develop Leaders at all Levels

[Download a detailed agenda here.](#)

### Space is Limited

We're getting close to our technical limits for audience size. And with less than 250 spots left, it's important that you register now.

## GRAPPLING WITH THE SCIENCE OF REALITY: DREAMS, ILLUSIONS, AND PERCEPTIONS

"Get real!" "You're not living in the real world." "That's a pipe dream that's completely out of touch with reality!" "Your delusional flights of fancy sound good but in actual fact..." "The reality of our situation is..." "Let me give you a dose of reality."

Anyone trying to stay positive and navigate during these turbulent times is faced with responses like these. But what is reality? Is there such a thing as objective reality? Our understanding of "the real world" is ever-shifting and extremely perplexing. The nature of reality is at the heart of fierce philosophical, spiritual, and psychological debates that have raged for thousands of years. The early 20th century Italian playwright Luigi Pirandello captures the elusive concept we're dealing with: "Whatever is a reality today, whatever you touch and believe in that seems real for you today, is going to be – like the reality of yesterday – an illusion tomorrow." One of his surrealistic American plays, 1927's "Right You Are

(If You Think You Are)," dealt with another age-old debate in the same realm as reality: the nature of truth.

A vast variety of today's "facts of life" that were once considered illusory are now accepted as reality. Imagine European time-traveling engineers or scientists from around 1400 looking at our life today. How dramatically would their view of reality shift when they saw this round (not flat) earth from the moon? Imagine the array of "facts" they'd have to radically and completely alter when they saw how we travel, communicate, grow our food, treat our illnesses, light and heat our homes, or entertain ourselves. How would they return to their time and try to define reality to their 13th century contemporaries? They'd be burned at the stake for heresy or locked away as raving lunatics.

What about 600 years from now? Given how rapidly the fields of science, technology, psychology, and sociology alone are evolving, today's "reality" will undoubtedly have altered even more dramatically in the next 600 years than in the last 600. We can't even imagine what radical new "reality" will be accepted facts of life in the 27th century. By today's understanding of how our world works, they would seem utterly impossible and absolutely unbelievable.

Last winter I wrote this piece for [Growing @ the Speed of Change](#) as the opening to Chapter Two on the slippery concept of reality. Since then I've come to believe even deeper that in the midst of the dramatic reshaping that's taking place in our world today we need to pay close attention to what new realities are being revealed to us. And we especially need to be conscious of, and deliberate about, what reality we're creating each day for ourselves.

## DEEPLY ENGAGING INTERVIEW ON CHANGE, REALITY, COMMUNICATION, AND LETTING OTHERS "SHOULD" ON YOU

I have participated in many media interviews over the years. I am currently in the midst of a flurry of interviews right now with my new book. Recently, speaker and social media coach, Anna Farmery, interviewed me for her Engaging Brand podcast. It was one of the best interviews I've ever had.

Many interviewers are overwhelmed with the number of guests on their show and the broad range of topics they cover. So it's all too common to have them stick to a script of questions and turn our time into getting through those without replying, listening, or engaging in a conversation. It's a set of parallel monologs rather than a conversation.

Anna was extraordinarily well prepared for our interview. She had studied [Growing @ the Speed of Change](#) and asked a series of very thoughtful questions. She also gave personal examples of her own struggles while applying some of the approaches we discussed. I can clearly see why her show has been nominated for the third year running as the Best Business Podcast.

Here's some of what we covered:

- **The Change Paradox** – we all know that life is change, yet we're often caught off guard by it in our search for stability and certainty.
- **What is Reality?** – the quirky world of quantum physics (which freaked out Einstein) shows we're bundles of energy in a universe of energy emanating thoughts of energy that changes our reality.
- **Information versus Communication** – ironically our technical "communication" tools are actually reducing communication as we confuse quantity and quality while struggling to Tame the

- E-Mail Beast and making ourselves dumber with multi-tasking.
- **Visualization** – using imagery and pictures of what we want.
- **Not Letting Others “Should” on Us** – not being driven by others’ expectations of us such as always being available or being pulled into Wallowing or Following rather than Leading.

Our interview lasted about 18 - 20 minutes. You can listen to it at [http://theengagingbrand.typepad.com/the\\_engaging\\_brand\\_/2009/11/jimclemmerpodcast.html](http://theengagingbrand.typepad.com/the_engaging_brand_/2009/11/jimclemmerpodcast.html). Go to the bottom of the page under the heading “How you can listen to the Engaging Brand” for listening options. Anna begins with some background on the Business Podcast awards and pays some bills by promoting her sponsor before we get into the interview.

## QUANTUM MECHANICS: NOW WHAT’S THE REAL WORLD?

One area that Anna Farmery (see above item on her podcast interview) had not heard of, and especially fascinated her, was the very strange new field of quantum mechanics. I find this topic incredibly intriguing and have been reading numerous books and watching documentaries on it. I am looking forward to watching “The Quantum Activist” DVD featuring Amit Goswami, physics professor (emeritus at the University of Oregon and author of ten books) that I just received last week.

Niels Bohr, a Danish physicist who received the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1922 for his pioneering contributions to modern understandings of atomic structure and quantum mechanics, said, “Those who are not shocked when they first come across quantum theory cannot possibly have understood it.” By the late 19th century, what’s now considered old or classical physics had established laws or “facts” of nature which explained quite neatly and seemingly completely how our physical world worked. The “real world” was fixed and known.

But as knowledge advanced and as abilities to observe and measure the physical world improved, bizarre new findings threw the mother of all curve balls at scientists’ views of how things really work. Reality shifted yet again.

Quantum mechanics deals with the behavior of matter and energy at the infinitesimally minute level of atoms and subatomic particles. Here’s a brief sample of the weird and wonderful discoveries that have emerged since the German physicist Max Planck published his paper in 1900. It ushered in the era of “new physics” or quantum mechanics:

- “Quantum entanglement” shows that two particles can be separated by vast distances and somehow are connected; that manipulation of one particle causes a reaction in the other.
- In the quantum world, particles behave so unpredictably that the best scientists can do is make probability guesses as to what might happen.
- Light behaves like both waves of energy and particles of matter.
- Solid matter doesn’t exist. We and everything around us are made up of interacting energy or force-fields.
- Based on calculations of physical mass in the universe, scientists can only find about five percent of the matter needed to hold it all together. A major scientific search is now underway for this “dark matter” and “dark energy,” for instance with the 27-kilometer Large Hadron Collider built by the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN.)
- Some particles travel backward in time. Some appear out of nowhere and then disappear in completely random patterns.
- “Empty spaces” within and between atoms are so full of energy that an area the size of a marble contains more energy than all the solid matter in the known universe.

- There's strong evidence to suggest that there are seven or more additional dimensions in the universe beyond the known dimensions of width, length, depth (3D) and time.
- Particles can be in two places at once – sometimes even thousands of places at the same time.
- It's impossible to objectively measure quantum behavior. The observer's very presence changes the experiment's outcome.

Talk about the speed of change! We're clearly a long, long way from defining any sort of objective or definite "reality." Reality is a moving target. What's "real" to us today will be considered naïve and laughable centuries from now.

## THOUGHTS THAT MAKE YOU GO HMMM ON...THE SLIPPERY SUBJECTIVITY OF REALITY

There are endlessly fascinating and puzzling conundrums posed by quantum physics as outlined in the above item on this topic. This quirky science is really challenging our understanding of reality. What really is reality? Here are observations on reality I published in [Growing @ the Speed of Change](#):

*"Reality: (noun) all of your experiences that determine how things appear to you; 'his world was shattered'; 'we live in different worlds'; 'for them demons were as much a part of reality as trees were'."*

- From WordNet lexical database of English, Cognitive Science Laboratory, Princeton University

*"Given that external reality is a fiction, the writer's role is almost superfluous. He does not need to invent the fiction because it is already there."*

- J.G. Ballard (1930 – ), a British writer who spent four years of his childhood in a Japanese prison camp, an experience described in his 1984 book *Empire of the Sun*

*"There are intangible realities which float near us, formless and without words; realities which no one has thought out, and which are excluded for lack of interpreters."*

- Natalie Clifford Barney (1876 – 1972), American expatriate who lived, wrote, and hosted a literary salon in Paris

*"What is meant by reality? It would seem to be something very erratic, very undependable – now to be found in a dusty road, now in a scrap of newspaper in the street, now a daffodil in the sun."*

- Virginia Woolf (1882 – 1941), British novelist, critic, and essayist

*"Reality leaves a lot to the imagination."*

- John Lennon (1940 – 1980), British songwriter, musician, and founding member of The Beatles

## LEADERSHIP FOR A HEALTHIER AND SAFER WORKPLACE – PODCAST NOW AVAILABLE

There are very few strictly "health or safety problems." But there are many leadership and organizational culture problems that show up in accidents, sickness, absenteeism, conflict, stress, and other symptoms of ineffectiveness. Like incompetent doctors, ineffective managers often make people sicker. Research shows that workers are three times more likely to experience accidents in a depressing workplace. Workers involved

in accidents or with higher levels of sickness have lower levels of job and organizational involvement and input. And a high stress workplace correlates with higher levels of sickness and injuries. The quality of supervision and leadership is a key factor in determining workplace stress levels.

Recently Jennifer Miconi-Howse, Communications Officer for the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (I am providing the opening keynote at their annual conference on [Leading Workplace Change on March 8, 2010](#)) interviewed me on the keys to building a healthier and safer workplace. We discussed:

- **The Connection Between Leadership and Health and Safety** – balancing management and leadership and the central role of emotions, caring, and employee engagement to reduce “we/they gaps.”
- **Barrick Gold’s Stellar Example of Dramatic Culture Change** – how they achieved a 75% reduction in safety incidents worldwide over three years. If you’d like to know more about their story and read articles written by their SVP, Don Ritz, go to an earlier blog posting at <http://www.jimclemmer.com/blog/?p=774>.
- **Developing a Health and Safety Culture** – how core values anchor organizational efforts while rules of engagement, norms, or expectations frame team efforts. Having courageous conversations and dealing with [Moose-on-the-Table](#) are key elements.

You can listen to the 10-minute interview at [http://media.libsyn.com/media/ccohs/Episode9\\_JimmClemmer\\_Final.mp3](http://media.libsyn.com/media/ccohs/Episode9_JimmClemmer_Final.mp3)

## EXCELLENT TIME LEADERSHIP RESOURCE: JIM ESTILL’S CEO BLOG

In today’s hyper-connected world there are many conflicting demands on our time. Technology makes it way too easy to get pulled into frittering (or Twittering) away bits of time here and there until suddenly the day or the week is gone and we’re left stressed out and wondering what we really accomplished. And multi-tasking actually makes us stupid. We lose IQ points by flip flopping our attention from one task to another. As with so much about personal, team, or organizational effectiveness, the issue is developing disciplined habits.

[Jim Estill’s blog](#) on time leadership is an excellent resource to help us get on track. Jim’s a remarkable and very successful entrepreneur. He started EMJ Data Systems, from the trunk of his car after graduating from the University of Waterloo with a degree in Systems Design Engineering. Practicing the disciplined habits and leadership philosophies found throughout his blog, Jim grew EMJ to a staff of over 300 people, with \$350 million in annual sales.

I met Jim a few times over the years and was always struck by his balance of management discipline and customer/people leadership. Jim attributes much of his success to his effectiveness at managing time. He has led numerous Time Leadership workshops, and has produced a Time Leadership CD.

This fall Jim was recognized by our local technology association, [Communitech](#), for the expertise and advice he provided to many early stage companies here in Waterloo Region. That includes a board membership at Blackberry maker RIM (Research in Motion) that began when the company first went public. The Blackberry is an excellent example of a technical tool that we can either master to make us more time effective or dumb us down and enslave us in multi-tasking stupidity.

We moved our family back to Waterloo Region (sixty miles west of Toronto) twenty years ago this fall. Heather and I first lived here when we were married in 1977 and then moved around Canada quite a bit for ten years until settling back here to raise our family. Lately I've been getting reconnected with the area (I travel outside this area quite a lot) in helping our son, Chris, establish his law career here (he aspires to be a local "rain maker" in building business relationships).

We've added blogs like Jim Estill's to my "[blogroll](#)" to provide a variety of resources that compliment what readers are getting from my blog. Please send me your recommendations for other blogs we might want to connect with. My e-mail is [Jim.Clemmer@Clemmer.net](mailto:Jim.Clemmer@Clemmer.net).

## THE VICTIMITIS VIRUS: UNDERMINING AND GIVING AWAY OUR POWER

A major problem we see time and again in workshops and consulting work is how individuals and entire management teams learn how to become more and more powerless. The insidious thing about learned helplessness is many people don't even recognize they have it. The Victimitis Virus is a silent killer moving so stealthily that sufferers don't recognize its symptoms. The fascinating thing is how it runs up and down all levels of so many organizations.

A central theme of my fictional story of Pete Leonard in [Moose on the Table: A Novel Approach to Communications @ Work](#) was how he gave his power away by acting as if he was powerless. He and his team slowly learned how to be more and more helpless.

A [Moose on the Table](#) reader e-mailed me that she quite liked the book. She bitterly complained, though, about not being in a position of power or authority the way she thought Pete Leonard and the other characters were. She was partially right, in that this book was directly applicable to those in supervisory or management roles. I targeted that group because they are the ones who so often disempower themselves; everyone else in the organization tends to see them as being more powerful than "the Petes" often see themselves as being. Pete's experiences were to provide a model for that group. They were also to provide a broader model for anyone wrestling with communication and courage.

Unfortunately, this reader fell into the trap of believing that power and authority come from position. I have long emphasized that *leadership is an action, not a position*. Leaders make it happen.

When we released *Moose on the Table*, I delivered a national series of one-day "Breaking Through the Bull" workshops. During one session, a participant blurted out, "Shouldn't senior management be addressing the moose issues and providing the leadership you've been discussing?" My answer was of course they should. But many don't.

That leaves you with three choices: 1. Live with the status quo (too many people who do that then jump on the Bitter Bus with lots of criticizing, condemning, and complaining); 2. Quit; or 3. Provide strong leadership within your own team or area while practicing upward leadership. Too many people working under ineffective managers stay in unhappy situations, don't strengthen their own leadership, and choose to become victims of poor leadership from above. If you're one of them, pull yourself out of the muck and head toward the leadership stairs.

## READ IT HERE OR HOT OFF MY BLOG

The items in each month's issue of *The Leader Letter* are first published in my [blog](#) (updated twice per week) the previous month. You can wait to read it all together each month in *The Leader Letter* or you can read

each item as a [blog](#) post and have them sent directly to you hot off my computer by signing up at <http://www.jimclemmer.com/blog/>. Just enter your e-mail address in the upper left-hand corner box under "Sign up for E-mail Blog Notification."

## EXPANDED BOOK AVAILABILITY ACROSS THE UK AND EUROPE

Every day a good portion of visitors to [www.JimClemmer.com](http://www.JimClemmer.com) – and new subscribers to *The Leader Letter* and my [blog](#) – come from the United Kingdom, Ireland and other European Union countries. Unfortunately the shipping costs of sending one or more books outside of North America make it prohibitively expensive to keep up with my published work.

All my books are now available in the United Kingdom, and throughout the European Union, with local shipping and no need to worry about currency exchange.

Here are links to all my books on Amazon.co.uk – but you should be able to find and order them through any retailer:

[Growing @ the Speed of Change](#)  
[The Leader's Digest](#)  
[Growing the Distance](#)  
[Moose on the Table](#)  
[Firing on All Cylinders](#)  
[Pathways to Performance](#)

If you do pick up one or more of these books, I'd also ask that you add a quick review when you've finished to make this material more "findable" on the Amazon.co.uk web site.

## MOST POPULAR NOVEMBER IMPROVEMENT POINTS

[Improvement Points](#) is a no-charge service to bring timely and inspirational quotes from my articles to subscribers three times a week. Built around our new [topic index](#), Improvement Points are crafted to help you become a better leader of yourself, your team and your organization. Each Improvement Point links directly to a full article on our web site. If you'd like to read more about the point being made in that day's Improvement Point, you simply click on the "Read the full article now" link below each IP. Many subscribers circulate especially relevant [Improvement Points](#) articles to their team, Clients, or colleagues for further discussion or action.

Here are the three most popular Improvement Points we sent out in November:

**"Many managers are getting sucked into an incredible vortex of busyness and daily fire fighting. It's becoming a bigger and bigger challenge to keep themselves and others focused and strategic in this 24/7, always-on, Blackberry culture. This is a large and rapidly growing problem that we are seeing in more and more organizations. When left unchecked, the problem leads to burnout, turnover, morale problems, frenzied everything-is-urgent wheel spinning, and poor execution."**

- from Jim Clemmer's article, "Are You in Control of or Controlled By Technology?"

[Read the full article now!](#)

**"Step back periodically to reflect on whether your frenzied pace is really getting you where you want to go. Keep a time log or take a hard look back at your calendar. How are you using your time? Do you get dragged into minor activities that others could handle? Is multitasking and are constant interruptions fragmenting your attention and limiting your ability to concentrate on important tasks or projects?"**

**Start reversing that by turning off the notifications for every incoming e-mail, get out of the office when you need to focus on important tasks to give yourself some breathing space and think time."**

- from Jim Clemmer's article, "Moving Out of a Career Rut"  
[Read the full article now!](#)

**"Successful leaders understand the difference between things and people in an organization. They know that it's important to manage things, but that it's even more important to lead people."**

- from Jim Clemmer's article, "Leaders Invest in Growing and Developing People"  
[Read the full article now!](#)

## **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 e-mail at [Jim.Clemmer@Clemmer.net](mailto:Jim.Clemmer@Clemmer.net).

**Keep learning, laughing, loving, and leading – living life just for the L of it!!**

**Jim**

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