# Jim Clemmer's *Leader Letter*

THE LEADER LETTER

Leading with *STRENGTH*

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## DECEMBER 2012, ISSUE 117

Lord Kelvin was a highly decorated and recognized 19th century British mathematical physicist and engineer. The list of his pioneering contributions to electricity, thermodynamics, and the emerging field of physics is a very long one. He was knighted by Queen Victoria for his work on the transatlantic telegraph. The guy was a genius.

He's **also famous for his assertion that** *"There is nothing new to be discovered in physics now. All that remains is more and more precise measurement."* Five years later, Albert Einstein published his paper on special relativity, which challenged the very simple set of rules laid down by Newtonian mechanics. It **opened an entirely new field of science that dramatically changed our world**.

This is one of many, many examples of **experts who become deeply entrenched in the existing model or framework**. From telephones, televisions, airplanes, personal computers, to the Internet, most of the technologies we now take for granted were once considered impossible by the experts viewing the world through the lens of existing models. **They didn't fit existing paradigms**.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a paradigm as *"a pattern or model, an exemplar."* Wikipedia provides a fascinating entry on paradigms. Much of it focuses on and quotes from the groundbreaking work of American physicist, historian, and philosopher of science, Thomas Kuhn, in his 1962 book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions.*

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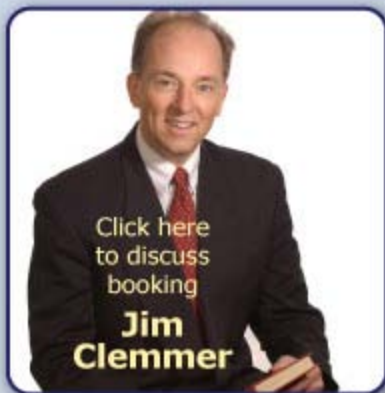
This passage in Wikipedia's discussion of paradigms really leapt out:

> *"for well-integrated members of a particular discipline, its **paradigm is so convincing that it normally renders even the possibility of alternatives unconvincing and counter-intuitive**. Such a paradigm is **opaque, appearing to be a direct view of the bedrock of reality itself, and obscuring the possibility that there might be other, alternative imageries hidden behind it.** The conviction that the current paradigm is reality **tends to disqualify evidence that might undermine the paradigm itself**…"*

That describes **exactly what's happening in the fields of Human Resources and Leadership and Organization Development right now**. And as I described in *Manifesto for a Leadership Development Revolution*, **I too became trapped by the current "bedrock" paradigm of needs analysis, gap analysis, and improvement planning**. This **weakness-based paradigm** of leadership and organization development is so strongly and unconsciously held by most of today's experts that it's **obscuring other possibilities**.

This issue combines all my November blog posts. It **features many items on the big paradigm shift to strengths-based leadership development.** This is a tough one for many of us heavily invested in our current training programs and approaches. **Science-based leadership research is rendering many of those traditional approaches obsolete**. The implications of this can be **profoundly threatening to our status quo -- and incredibly exciting, filled with new development possibilities**.

**Performance management systems and leadership competency models have become another example of a deeply entrenched paradigm that's becoming "a bedrock of reality."** And most of them are **built on a set of shaky foundations and dangerous assumptions**. This issue's lead item on **"6 Reasons Many Leadership Competency Models Fail"** explains what the most common ones are. It's followed by **"5 Keys to Make Competency Models Flourish."** These have both been combined into a new white paper, *Leadership Competency Models: Why Many Are Failing and How to Make them Flourish*.

Paradigms like our personal philosophies or worldview appear so normal **we often don't even recognize the pattern** that's trapped our thinking. That's **Paradigm Paralysis**; *"the inability or refusal to see beyond the current models of thinking."* **Performance management and competency-based leadership development that builds on strengths is a new paradigm.** This can change our world -- **if we can change our lens and see it**.

# 6 REASONS MANY LEADERSHIP COMPETENCY MODELS FAIL

Most progressive organizations today are using **leadership competency models to outline the key skills and behaviors they want to see in their supervisors, managers, and executives**. Leadership competency models can provide **a structured framework for defining and developing** those behaviors that have the biggest impact on an organization's performance. **Used effectively, they become a roadmap to dramatically higher leadership effectiveness.**

There's **a decades-long history of failed organization initiatives**. Dozens of studies have shown that **50 - 70% of organization improvement initiatives** like customer service, leadership development, performance management systems, restructuring, quality improvement, etc., **have failed.** The implementation of **leadership competency models is clearly heading toward that same cliff.**

Here are **six common traps ensnaring many of today's leadership competency models**:

## 1. Out of Thin Air

We've been guilty of facilitating workshops with management teams pulling competencies out of thin air. In one case, we had 140 of the organization's top leaders in an offsite retreat go through a shifting process to identify and vote on their top 10 competencies. The descriptions of each one were then crafted by a small group of leaders based on the blizzard of Post-It-Notes grouped around each of the competency clusters. Some organizations shuffle, sift, and prioritize card decks listing generic competency sets.

As I outlined in [Leadership Lessons from Evidence-Based Medicine](#), **what's missing is proof that these competencies matter to the organization**. **Where is the empirical data** that these are the key behaviors that have the greatest impact on employee engagement, attraction and retention, customer service levels, quality, innovation, safety, productivity, sales, and profits? **How do we know we have the right competencies?**

## 2. It's a Bird, It's a Plane, It's SuperLeader!

Many leadership competency models provide a series of behavioral descriptions clustered around 6 to 16 or more headings. **If they're relevant and well written, the descriptions are very helpful.** What's implied is that the pathway to peak performance is improvement across dozens of skills and behaviors.

This **pathway to perfection is overwhelming and completely unrealistic**. At best, **leadership development that's a mile wide and an inch deep moves a leader from good to a bit better**. More often, motivation to develop and follow a personal development plan to become SuperLeader **fizzles out and crashes.**

## 3. One Size Fits All

Most competency models **weight all the competencies and dozens of underlying behaviors equally.** Some models layer the competencies across organizational levels starting with frontline staff, and moving up to supervisors, managers, and executives.

This SuperLeader model **doesn't account for vast variances in individual preferences across leaders or their widely differing functions**. Each of us mere mortals is a unique **mixture of strengths and weaknesses**. We have work areas that **play to our passions and turn us on** and areas that are **a real chore and turn us off. One-size-fits-all competency models** don't account for those differences.

For example, a supervisor, manager, or executive in accounting or IT will have **a very different set of competencies and passions leading to their successful leadership** than someone in sales or customer service. Competencies such as analytical and problem solving or technical/professional expertise versus those of communication or building relationships **take on a different weight for each role**. And each competency **plays quite differently to the natural strengths and weaknesses of each leader and the personal preferences that motivated him or her to choose their field or profession**.

## 4. The Way of the Weakness

We're largely unconscious of how **we equate improvement, development, and personal growth with finding and fixing weaknesses.** Improving low marks is **deeply socialized in us** going way back to our school report cards. When a leader gets a 360 feedback report from his or her direct reports, peers, manager, and others his or her natural instinct is to **quickly skip past positive ratings and comments and look at "where I need to improve."**

Our research shows **unless there's a Fatal Flaw needing immediate attention, this is badly off track**. The best that MIGHT happen is the leader raises a few of his or her competencies from **poor to average**.

Our research also shows that **leaders who focus on their weaknesses** consistently create **weaker development plans**, allocate **less of their time to personal growth,** and **abandon training efforts more quickly**. In one study we found

executives working on weaknesses reported their leadership improvement efforts had minimal impact on business results and even less effect on the commitment or engagement levels of their direct reports.

### 5. Here Comes the Judge

In the dark ages of medicine, sick patients were often bled under the badly misguided belief that bloodletting released toxins ("humors") and restored the body's proper balance. This unscientific -- and sometimes deadly -- practice often **left patients weaker** and less able to fight off their illness.

If a leader's raters know that the leader's boss will be seeing the assessment results they will change their ratings. **And the entire process is transformed from development to evaluation**. Now the conversation between boss and the rated leader generally moves toward **performance bloodletting**. After a cursory acknowledgement of strengths -- and under the misguided belief they are holding the leader "accountable" -- most bosses (often with poor coaching skills) will **focus in on weaknesses and demand the leader address and improve these**. It's little wonder many **performance appraisals are put off and approached with as much enthusiasm as a medieval doctor's house call**.

### 6. Performance (Mis)Management Systems

Too many HR departments and executives **confuse competencies and performance outcomes**. They'll **use competency models to try evaluating and holding supervisors, managers, and executives accountable** for all of the competencies and the dozens of behaviors describing each one.

**Effective performance management holds people accountable for delivering results. These targets are the "what"** and might include sales, margins, profits, new products/services, project implementation, production levels, service/quality levels, productivity rates, budget numbers, and the like. **Well designed and well researched competency maps provide pathways for the "how"** to reach these performance goals.

The **BIG CAVEAT** is that **both the "what" and the "how" must be delivered within the bounds of core organizational values**. Delivering results while destroying the environment, risking safety, reducing customer satisfaction, or destroying teamwork, is unacceptable.

Sound familiar? My next blog post will look at what the research tells us about how to effectively develop and use leadership competency models.

# 5 KEYS TO MAKE LEADERSHIP COMPETENCY MODELS FLOURISH

These keys come from what's been learned over the decade of implementing the [Strengths-Based Leadership Development System](#). Jack Zenger, Joe Folkman, and their team have compiled **a huge body of research on the best practices for developing and effectively using leadership competency models:**

## 1.What Really Matters: Correlate Competencies to Performance Outcomes

**Highly effective leaders have a dramatic impact** on morale, teamwork, engagement, innovation, customer satisfaction, quality, productivity, safety, sales, and profits. But **which behaviors have the greatest impact**?

Zenger Folkman's research began with looking at **survey responses from over 200,000 raters of more than 20,000 leaders**. Each of the data sets represented different **customized 360 surveys from a wide variety of organizations across dozens of sectors with nearly 2,000 behavioral descriptions or survey items**. They searched for the **competencies that sharply delineated the top 10 percent from the bottom 10 percent of leaders by their performance outcomes.**

This scientific search for the key leadership competencies identified **16 competencies in five clusters**:

## Differentiating Competencies

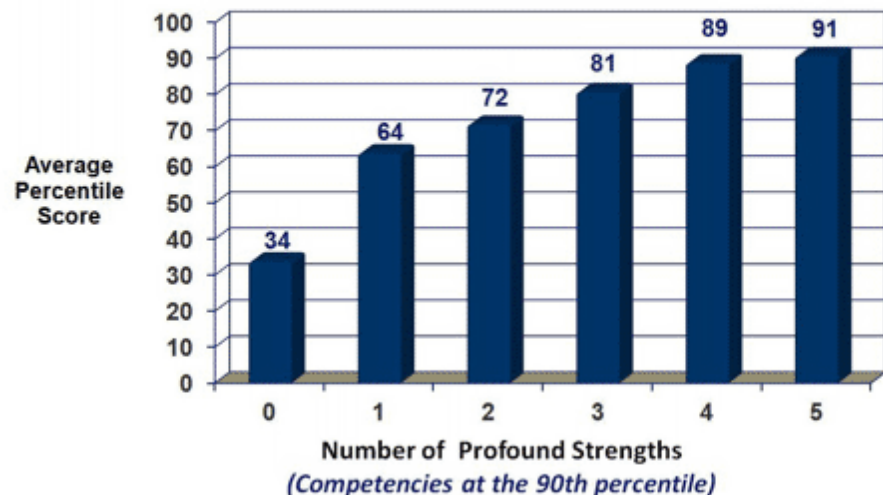| Focus on Results | Leading Change | Character | Interpersonal Skills | Personal Capability |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| •Drives for Results | •Develops Strategic Perspective | •Displays High Integrity and Honesty | •Communicates Powerfully and Prolifically | •Technical/ Professional Expertise |
| •Establishes Stretch Goals | •Champions Change | | •Inspires and Motivates Others to High Performance | •Solves Problems and Analyzes Issues |
| •Takes Initiative | •Connects the Group to the Outside World | | •Builds Relationships | •Innovates |
| | | | •Develops Others | •Practices Self-Development |
| | | | •Collaboration and Teamwork | |

Using our deep research data base **we'll often help organizations adapt their own customized competency models.** The key is **validating their competencies and descriptions with research that these behaviors have the greatest impact on performance results.**

## 2. Don't Try to Do it All: Build 3- 5 Competencies from Good to Great

Extraordinary leaders rated at the 90th percentile deliver outstanding performance results that are **3 - 20 times higher** than those at the 10th percentile. And top performing leaders deliver **results that are double or more than average or good leaders rated at the 50th or 60th percentile.**

The best news is that **extraordinary leaders don't need to be SuperLeaders excelling at all competencies to perform at the 80th and 90th percentiles**. Improving just **three to five of sixteen competencies** from good to great will do it. And it doesn't really matter which competencies we choose. So we can **pick those that are natural strengths, are most relevant to our job, and we're most energized about developing further.**

## Overall Leadership Effectiveness



Average Percentile Score vs. Number of Profound Strengths (Competencies at the 90th percentile): 0 → 34, 1 → 64, 2 → 72, 3 → 81, 4 → 89, 5 → 91

## 3. Develop Towering Strengths to Overshadow Weaknesses

Think of the best leader you know personally. What were this leader's three to five most profound strengths? Did he or she have any weaknesses or areas at which he or she did not excel? What kept those weaknesses for undermining his or her overall impact?

Perfect leaders don't exist. **Leaders who excel at the 90th percentile across all competencies are exceedingly rare.** Leadership development that comes across as the pursuit of perfection ("here are the pages and pages of competencies and behaviors you must excel at to be an outstanding leader") is often de-motivating.

**Leadership development that looks to magnify a smaller number of natural strengths that really make a difference is highly energizing. That's why rates of personal growth, leadership development, and improvement double!**



## 4. Use Competency Models for Building and Developing

**The sole purpose of a leadership competency model is to help leaders improve their effectiveness.** A Strengths-Based Leadership Development System built on a relevant and validated competency model is **a roadmap to higher performance.** Like a GPS mapping device, the competency framework and 360 feedback assessment help a leader **identify where he or she is now and which routes will take them to their next performance level.**

**Companion Competency mapping is a very critical element in this approach.** This **guides leaders in using strengths cross-training to plot their improvement journey**. Here's one of our studies illustrating the dramatic difference of using competencies and 360 feedback to build strengths versus finding and fixing weaknesses:

# The Powerful Impact of Building Strengths

| Executives Responded to These Statements: | Build Strength | Fix Weakness |
|---|---|---|
| I have created **an excellent development plan** that will guide my efforts to improve. | 63% | 13% |
| As a result of my use of the 360 feedback process, report, and tools, I feel that I have **improved in my overall leadership effectiveness**. | 72% | 38% |
| I feel that I have **moved forward on improving the specific issues** on my development plan. | 68% | 43% |
| I have **taken the time and made a real effort** to work on my development plan. | 60% | 38% |

The **one exception to focusing on strengths** is if a 360 assessment shows the leader has a **Fatal Flaw**. That's a competency which is **important to the leader's job and he or she is performing so poorly that others can't see past the glare of this gap to his or her strengths.** When that's the case, the leader needs to focus all improvement energy here.

## 5. Evaluate Performance Results (The What) Not Competencies (The How)

U.S. General George S. Patton delivered big results in World War Two. Under his leadership his army advanced further, captured more enemy prisoners, and liberated more territory in less time than any other army in history. A German field marshal speaking to American reporters called Patton "your best general." Patton once articulated a key element in his performance management approach; *"Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do and they will surprise you with their ingenuity."*

**Effective performance management systems identify what to do**. They **set clear targets and measurement of success**. An effective strengths-based leadership competency model **helps people apply their ingenuity in playing to their passions and leveraging their natural strengths to meet organizational needs specific to their role.**

# The Power of Convergence
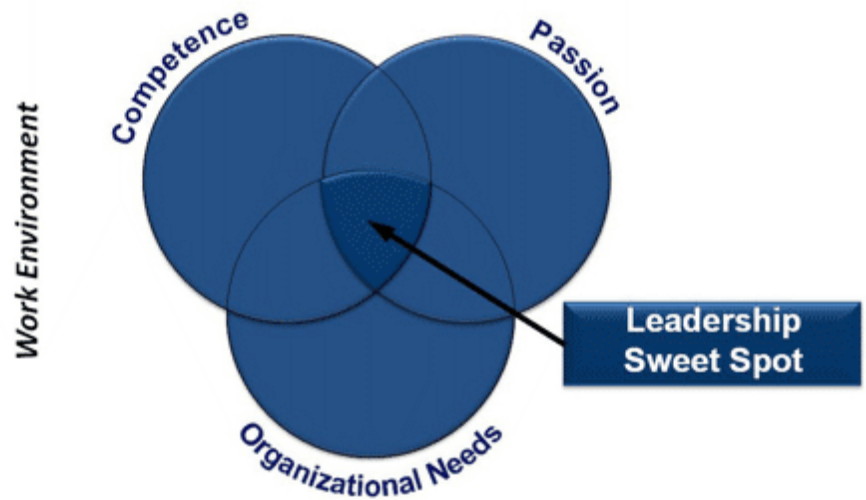


**Further Reading:**

- Free e-book (with short embedded video clips featuring Jack Zenger and Joe Folkman) "Organizations Flourish with Strong Leaders"
- ***How to Be Exceptional: Drive Leadership Success by Magnifying Your Strengths.***
- Manifesto for a Leadership Development Revolution
- Recommended White Papers in the Leadership Resource Center (freely available once registered):
    - *"Extraordinary Leader 360 Survey: Validation and Reliability"*
    - *"How Extraordinary Leaders Double Profits"*
    - *"Leadership 6.0: Connecting Leadership Development with Drivers of Business Results"*
    - *"The 11 Components of a Best-in-Class 360-Degree Assessment"*
    - *"Make Performance Appraisals an Inspiring Event"*
- Strengths-Based Leadership Development System

## LEADERSHIP COMPETENCY MODELS: WHY MANY ARE FAILING AND HOW TO MAKE THEM FLOURISH

The two blog posts above on leadership competencies generated some stimulating discussion and feedback on **the promise and problems of this popular approach to leadership development**. Given the **central importance of this issue to leadership and organization development**, both these blogs are now available as a white paper. Click on *Leadership Competency Models: Why Many Are Failing and How to Make them Flourish* to read it online or download a PDF version.

Jack Zenger and I had further **discussion on the use and abuse of leadership competency models** following these blog posts. I asked Jack for his views and experience on **why many leadership competency models are struggling** but we don't yet have clear research on their failure rates such as we do with other strategic initiatives. He offered these insightful observations/assumptions:

1. *There are **no good metrics** that tell you that it succeeded or failed. That is unlike a merger, acquisition, or reorganization.*
2. *There is **a great deal of emotional investment in competency models**, especially when they were developed by interviewing all of the senior executives. It is hard for them to acknowledge that they were wrong or misguided in their original decisions. So they persist even when they are nonsense (such as one organization that listed as a competency "seeing around the corner to anticipate future events").*
3. *Many companies **don't pay all that much attention to the competency model**. So there is no great motivation to change it.*
4. *The **changes usually occur when there is a new cast of characters** that come into make their mark in the HR arena. So the change in competency model change is often attributed to the regime change.*

Chapter Four, "The Competency Quest," in Jack and Joe Folkman's foundational and ground breaking book, *The Extraordinary Leader: Turning Good Managers into Great Leaders* provides deeper research and useful perspectives on this issue. They identify and expand on four reasons "*why the competency movement has not borne more fruit:*

- **Complexity** -- … i*t's not unusual to see organizations with lists of 30 - 50 competencies for their leaders to be evaluated and developed against.*
- **Some Faulty Assumptions About Competencies** -- *each organization has its own unique set of competencies, competencies within each person are distinct and separate from each other, the more similarity or congruence between an individual and the organization's unique pattern, the better leader*

*he or she will be, competencies are all of roughly equal importance, and the best way to develop a competency is to focus directly on that specific trait or behavior.*

- **Unintended Consequences** -- *competencies are a checklist, everyone needs to be adequate in each competency, the greatest value comes from moving a competency to a middle range where it no longer stands out, and no emphasis has been given to taking a relative strength and making it "off-the-chart" strong.*
- **Poor Execution** -- *competency models have evolved into a process for compiling the collective beliefs of senior managers regarding the important attributes of the firm, the more general the competencies become, the less accurate they are, focused on past requirements and not what the future will require of leaders, and competencies are not being used for selection and promotion."*

What's been your experience with using leadership competency models? What's worked and what hasn't been effective?

## THE ENDURING IMPACT OF FOCUSING ON STRENGTHS

Years ago a 7th grade teacher gave her class and up close and personal exercise in **finding and building on strengths**. She began by circulating sheets of paper that had only the name of each student at the top of each blank page. Students were asked to **identify what they felt was the greatest strength of that student or build on a strength that someone else had already noted.**

Once each paper was circulated around the entire classroom and **every student added their feedback the completed sheet with their name on it was given to each student**. Students studied their feedback and then summarized what they'd been told in a brief verbal report to the rest of the class. **The increase in positivity, energy levels, engagement, cooperation, and grades was immediate and lasting.**

Ten years later one of the students in that class was killed in military action during his time in the marines. The young marine's body was flown home to his family for burial. During the funeral one of the pall bearers recognized his 7th grade teacher and **talked with her about the enduring impact of her strength building exercise**. The young marine's parents overheard the conversation and joined in. *"Thank you so much for the big difference you made to Ryan's school life,"* the deceased young marine's mother said to the teacher as she wiped a tear from her eye. "*He was the smallest kid in grade seven*

*and was getting bullied by bigger kids. His self-esteem was slipping and he was becoming more withdrawn. **That exercise changed his perspective and was a big part of turning him around. He carried that sheet of paper everywhere**. It was tattered, torn, and falling apart in the wallet they just returned to us with his things earlier this week."*

- **What if the teacher had asked the kids to write down weaknesses and improvement suggestions?**
- **Why do most performance reviews focus on fixing weaknesses rather than leveraging strengths?**
- **What's the lingering effect on motivation to improve and performance?**

## THOUGHTS THAT MAKE YOU GO HMMM ON … MAKING STRENGTHS PRODUCTIVE (PETER DRUCKER)

One of the first management books I read when I became a supervisor at Culligan Water in the mid-seventies was Peter Drucker's slim and wisdom packed book, *The Effective Executive*. **Chapter 4; "Making Strengths Productive," was especially helpful**. In subsequent management roles **I found myself recalling or referring back to his practical and powerful perspectives on balancing strengths versus weaknesses.**
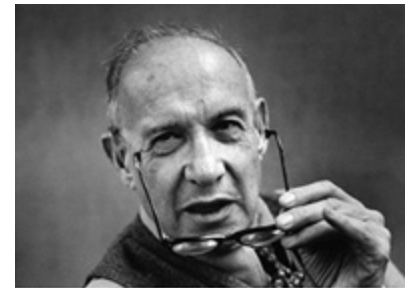
Peter Drucker, courtesy of The Drucker Institute at Claremont Graduate University

Often called "the father of modern management" **it's surprising that the field of leadership and leadership development has taken decades to finally research and build on Drucker's advice about strengths-based leadership.**

> "The idea that there are 'well-rounded' people, people who have only strengths and no weaknesses … is a prescription for mediocrity if not for incompetence … Where there are peaks, there are valleys. And no one is strong in many areas. Measured against the universe of human knowledge, experience, and abilities, even the greatest genius would have to be rated a total failure."

> "People with outstanding accomplishments in many areas are unknown. Even Leonardo performed only in the area of design despite his manifold interests …"

> "To staff from what there is not and to focus on weakness is wasteful -- a misuse, if not abuse, of the human resource."

> "Effective executives lead from strength in their own work. They make productive what they can do."

"… making strength productive is as much an attitude as it is a practice. But it can be improved with practice."

"In every area of effectiveness within an organization, one feeds the opportunities and starves the problems … only strength produces results. Weakness only produces headaches -- and the absence of weakness produces nothing."

"The task of an executive is not to change human beings. Rather … the task is to multiply performance capacity of the whole by putting to use whatever strength, whatever health, whatever aspiration there is in individuals."

"To focus on weakness is not only foolish; it is irresponsible … organization must serve the individual to achieve through his strengths and regardless of his limitations and weaknesses."

## WHY MOST IMPROVEMENT PLANS COMING FROM ORGANIZATION SURVEYS HAVE LITTLE IMPACT

Last month I met with an HR VP to discuss **lifting organizational performance through leadership and culture development.** The company was doing well and growing through a few strategic acquisitions. Levels of customer satisfaction, service/quality, safety, productivity, and profits were good but not great. He and the senior team were **looking for ways to boost performance and build a great organization.**

The company was diligently **surveying and tracking employee engagement and satisfaction with leadership behaviors, teamwork and cooperation, communication, performance management/coaching, and the like**. He showed me an impressive set of data taken every six months for the past few years comparing results across divisions and corporate departments.

But **nothing significant was changing**. The **survey scores were static across the last few years**. While their measurements were well beyond what many companies do, **their actions were way too typical -- and ineffective**. While we reviewed the data he quickly skipped over the stronger scores and zeroed in on the red colored numbers. These were **the lowest or weak areas that he felt needed the most attention**. He explained that managers in those divisions and departments would be

meeting with their teams to review the data and develop "improvement plans."

**The vast majority of organizational "improvement plans" follow this well-worn path to mediocrity through finding and fixing weaknesses**. This **weakness-based approach** is very effective for helping an organization move their performance from bad to good. This is **linear development**; focus on what's not working very well and decrease or eliminate what's clearly off track while increasing what's needed to pull up performance.

But this company was doing pretty well. They were already good. **Our research clearly shows that moving from good to great calls for a very different approach**. We need to **understand our strengths and figure out how to leverage them from good to great. That calls for a non-linear approach we call cross-training**.

Boeing's Aerospace Support attributed our cross-training approach to huge increases in organizational effectiveness and winning the very prestigious and rigorous Malcolm Baldrige award. HR Director, Dee Thomas explains:

"At Boeing's Aerospace Support division, we had concerns about our level of employee commitment. Our work with the Extraordinary Leader introduced us to the research showing a connection between leadership effectiveness and employee commitment. Partnering with Zenger Folkman, we created a competency model, an on-line multi-rater feedback process, and a workshop to help our leaders develop their strengths.

Using the 'cross training' approach; our leaders achieved an across-the-board improvement of close to 15% in their year-over-year employee commitment scores. Not only did our best leaders get better, but our 'average' leaders and even our poorest leaders showed marked improvement in their leadership effectiveness and employee commitment scores. This improvement was a critical factor in our qualifications for the Malcolm Baldrige award, which our division won."

***Further Reading:***

- [Competency Companion Development Guide to Cross-Training](#)
- [Leadership Cross Training is Powerful and Revolutionary](#)
- [Cross-Training for Your Leadership Marathon](#)
- [Powerful Combination: Drive for Results and Builds Relationships](#)

## THIS JUST IN … KISSING UP TO YOUR BOSS DOESN'T WORK

Last month Zenger Folkman issued a press release in honor of **National Boss Day**. Not realizing there was such a day (does that say something about me as a boss?), I looked it up. I learned that it's celebrated on October 16 in the United States and Canada as "a day for employees to thank their bosses for being kind and fair throughout the year." It was registered with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in 1958 and backed by an Illinois Governor in 1962 who officially proclaimed the day. Hallmark offered a card for sale in 1979 and "increased the size of its National Boss Line" by 28 percent in 2007!

But for anyone hoping that kissing up to their boss will increase ratings of their effectiveness they're **falling for a tired old stereotype -- and badly off track**. *"A common assumption that people make about improving the rating of their manager is that over-the-top efforts to score 'brownie points' helps those who stoop to that kind of behavior,"* said Jack Zenger, CEO of Zenger Folkman. *"**There are more significant steps employees can take to effectively manage their manager and receive high marks**."*

In a study of over 27,000 leaders, **Zenger Folkman identified managers who rated their direct reports significantly more positive than others rated them and compared this group to those whose manager rated them significantly lower than others rated them**. The study identified **eight key behaviors that lead to success with a manager:**

- Having strategic clarity and direction
- Quickly recognizing problems, trends, and opportunities
- Looking for opportunities to improve
- Setting stretch goals
- Energizing and inspiring others
- Taking initiative and achieving results
- Embracing change and innovation
- Communicating powerfully

***"There are significant issues that managers care about, and proactively practicing these eight behaviors will help employees earn the respect of their managers,"*** said Joe Folkman, president of Zenger Folkman. *"Our recommendation is that you **select two of these behaviors that would have the greatest impact on your job assignment and where you have passion and interest in improvement**."*

Zenger Folkman's new book, *How to Be Exceptional: Drive Leadership Success by Magnifying Your Strengths* (*The Globe and Mail* review is at

_Excellent? Counterintuitive tips on how to be exceptional_) provides **a very helpful roadmap** to follow Joe's recommendation.

Clearly the best way to please your boss is with **big kisses of extraordinary performance**! That comes from **building a few of your natural strengths (ones that really matter to your job) from good to great**.

## TWEET READING: RECOMMENDED ONLINE RESOURCES

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.

My original tweet commenting on the article precedes each title and descriptor from the original source:

**We equate development and personal growth with finding and fixing weaker areas. Building strengths is much more energizing and productive.**

"Develop Leadership Strength Over Weakness" - Chief Learning Officer
www.clomedia.com

"_Instead of focusing on correcting one's weaknesses, research shows that building one's strengths makes leaders more effective._"

**Jack's seven points from Zenger Folkman's research are what extraordinary leaders do to create an inspiring and energizing workplace.**

"The Productivity Improvement Steering Wheel: 7 Powerful Steps Every Leader Can Take" - Jack Zenger
www.forbes.com

"_Research has shown that there are huge differences in the productivity of people in any occupation and the more complex the job, the larger the difference between top performers and those at the bottom._"

**Feedback is like the flashing blue dot in Google Maps that shows us "You are here." Solid tips on how to use feedback for learning & growth.**

"Thick Skin Thinking: How To Use Negative Feedback To Your Advantage" - Denis Wilson
www.fastcompany.com

*"Studies show that people who solicit and accept feedback are more effective leaders and more successful at work. Here's how to take the sting out of feedback and make it work for you."*

**This article features research on a new approach to organizational surveys for building organizational strengths.**

"[Correlate The Skills You NEED With The Skills Your Company VALUES Most](#)" - Jack Zenger
[http://blogs.forbes.com](http://blogs.forbes.com)

*"There are literally thousands of variables that leave leaders baffled as they sift through the clutter of needs and options to decide what is crucial."*

## READ *THE LEADER LETTER* IN TWICE WEEKLY INSTALLMENTS

The **items in each month's issue of *The Leader Letter* are first published in my twice 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 one of my books**. 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@Clemmer.net](mailto:Jim.Clemmer@Clemmer.net) or connect with me on [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), [FaceBook](#), or my [blog](#)!

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

**Jim**

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