



Practical Leadership:

Inspiring *Action*, Achieving Results

Jim Clemmer's Leader Letter

March 2004, Issue 12 ~ View on-line at www.clemmer.net

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Keeping Problems in Perspective

In February, I was running a *Leadership @ the Speed of Change* workshop with a group of participants who were struggling with staying positive during a very tumultuous time in their organization. We were talking about the choice we all have: either we can focus on a problem and let it overwhelm us, or we can keep things in perspective and re-frame what's wrong within the much larger frame of what's going right.

To illustrate this point, I drew a large heavy dot on a clean flipchart page with a blue marker. I then talked about how we can narrowly focus on just the dot by restricting our field of vision to this problem and ignoring the rest of the page. I demonstrated this by forming a circle with my index finger and thumb, encircling my eye with it, and thrust my finger and thumb encircled eye right up to the dot on the flipchart page, so that's all I could see.

I didn't realize the marker was leaking and blue ink was all over my index finger. When I pulled back from the flipchart and looked back at the audience, instead of seeing participants enraptured with my graphic demonstration, I was greeted with hearty laughter. Apparently there was a very large blob of blue ink around my eye. A participant in the front row offered me a moist cloth to clean myself up. I began wiping around my eye as I continued to make my point about how our focus becomes our reality.

As I was saying this, I was greeted by more laughter. I had apparently smeared much of the ink all around my eye and the side of my face. This time I was given a mirror and more wipes and paper napkins. The group continued to be amused by my attempts to clean off the ink. I reduced the ink, but never did get it all off my face until I got home later that day.

This messy and amusing event turned out to be an accidental and quite profound illustration of an even bigger point. When we get overly focused on a problem we not only can't see much else, but we often smear ourselves and make an even bigger mess of things. **We can easily go from having a problem, to making ourselves blue.**

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Choosing My Perspective

In many of my workshops and keynote speeches I use the following model to illustrate the choices we have when dealing with adverse changes or difficulties. Anyone can be positive and optimistic when things are going well. But when we face big setbacks or get hit with bad news, it takes a lot more work to keep our focus "above the line."

**Tools, Tips, and Techniques for...Living Above the Line**

Following are a few "personal application ideas" I pulled together in an extensive redesign I have just completed for a practical implementation workbook based on *Growing the Distance* for my new **Practical Leadership Strategies for Peak Performance** workshop (see www.clemmer.net/events/pls/pls.shtml for details).

- Search out/collect stories of inspiring people who have overcome large obstacles in their lives (see www.clemmer.net/excerpts/pf_leaderscontrol.html for examples from *Growing the Distance*). When you're facing a big problem or setback, compare it to these stories to reframe your situation and change your perspective.
- Do you mostly see the slush on the windshield or the winter wonderland beyond? (see www.clemmer.net/excerpts/choice_more.shtml for this story from *Growing the Distance*.) What's your reality? What would you like your reality to be? When and how are you going to change your perspective?
- Ask people who know you well to allocate the percentage of time you spend in Navigator, Survivor, and Victim mode. Ask for their help in identifying Victim Speak in your conversation.
- Be a conversation navigator. When the talk is negative, find ways to provide evidence of a more positive perspective, offer alternative solutions or viewpoints, or question the usefulness of using that negative framework.

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- Are you part of the solution or part of the problem? Are you a reactor or leader? Does your own attitude and do your actions just reflect the temperature of your more senior managers to the people in your part of the organization? Or do you try to readjust and change the temperature? How do you know?

How Management Teams Victimize Themselves

In *The Leader's Digest*, I wrote a large section on how many times I run into management teams that disempower themselves. Managers will often sink "below the line" into Pity City as they round up the usual suspects and engage in rigorous rounds of "blame storming." This generally involves pointing fingers at "them" as managers bitterly complain about how "they wouldn't let us," "they are doing it to us again," or "if only they would get their act together we'd be able to do our jobs."

In designing the new *Leader's Digest* application workbook for the **Practical Leadership Strategies for Peak Performance** workshop, I designed a "Disempowering Ourselves" assessment exercise for management teams around these common causes of managers' inaction:

- More senior management/boards
- Other groups/departments/regions/head office
- Rules/policies/procedures
- Tradition/"we've always done it this way"
- Toxic/victim/negative culture
- Key external partners
- Group dynamics/processes
- Poor communications
- External factors (e.g. economy, politics, media, weather, competition, customer demands, etc.)
- New technologies/processes

Tools, Tips, and Techniques for...Navigating Change

- Continually reaffirm and reinforce your team's small wins and successful improvements to build a sense of momentum.
- The poorer your boss or those higher in your organization are at setting priorities, the better you and your team must be at doing this. You may need a daily, weekly, or monthly process to reset your goals and priorities as conditions and demands change.



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- Whose timetable are you following? Readiness for change is a major factor in getting people on board. Are you pushing an idea or change well before its time? Do you need to bide your time and wait for the need to become stronger or the right opportunity to present itself?
- Start meetings with a review of the progress you've made, recent accomplishments, or recognition and appreciation activities. Counterbalance your problem-solving by keeping things in a bigger perspective.
- Build networks and coalitions, especially if you're trying to influence significant change. Work with those people who are ready to move forward and build momentum with you. Don't fixate on the fence sitters, naysayers, or resisters. Involve your boss where appropriate.
- At least once per year meet with your team in an offsite planning retreat to review progress, set priorities, and establish a plan for next year.

Explaining the "FISH! Philosophy"

"I am a new reader of your material for the last few months. I really appreciate your articles, tips, advice, and all the material you send to me every month. I would like to thank you very much.

In your February issue a letter sent to you by Dave Moore used the expression "Fish Philosophy." ([click here](#) to read that letter)

What is the meaning of this expression, and in which context can we use it?"

Here's my response to this reader's e-mail:

I am glad to hear that you find my material so useful.

Your question showed that I should have clarified this comment in the newsletter itself. Dave is referring to a popular video entitled "FISH!" It was shot at Seattle's Pike Fish Market. The philosophy is:

- 1. Play**
- 2. Make Their Day**
- 3. Be There**
- 4. Choose Your Attitude**

You can get details on (and preview) this video and its many spin-off products at www.charthouse.com.

Thanks for asking the question that I am sure many other readers had!

Jim

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A Reader's Top Ten Survival Tips for Victimitis

Hello Jim,

I was searching on Google for anyone who speaks of victimitis. I had come up with a Top Ten list for those who have to deal with victims. It comes from personal experience and reading Boomeritus by Ken Wilber (he speaks of victimitis as being deadly, too). I thought the user-friendliness of this list would be helpful for all of us who have a short attention span. See what you think...

Top Ten Survival Tips Against Perpetual "Victimitis"***1. Turn That Frown Upside Down***

Be positive to neutralize the negativity that victims spread (as well as the rest of us to some degree!). It may feel strange at first, but fake it till you make it! Make jokes! Think of being on Jerry Springer arguing with that person, then it'll be funny...

2. You're Sad? I'm Not!

Never feel guilty because they are sad. Any loving person would not want you to be unhappy, so you should love yourself enough not to fall into the same trap.

3. The Time Is Now

Stay in the present timeframe. Victims thrive on the past. Don't feed into it or talk about them in the past tense. They'll sense it.

4. Awe - Not You Too!

Don't be a victim of their victimitis, even when it is justified, it'll weaken your defense.

5. Talk to the Hand

Never react emotionally to a victim - they feed on it because they are jealous, and knowing that you are affected is what makes them feel better and more "even."

6. Wasted Words and Thoughts

Don't bother to think of ways to snap them out of their victimhood, their negative state of mind prevents them from making any effort to overcome personal dysfunctions. Most are just plain lazy, which is what makes them so dangerous. Trying to figure out crazy people will make you crazy. Don't take this lightly.

7. It Ain't Fair

The victim's motivation is always to win, since they feel they've been dealt a bad hand and need to compensate by whining to get their way. Don't play their game, then they won't have a chance or the drama.

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8. I Drink Alone

The victim's mindset is all about them, so there is never a reason to take it personally. Take a step back and see yourself objectively. Have compassion for yourself most of all. Victims never do this, which is why they never change and always need someone to leech on to. They have no idea who they are or what they want. It's a constant state of confusion that frustrates the hell out of them! Recognize this and have compassion for them, but also realize that there is nothing you can do - holding the mirror up to them can have disastrous effects. Stay disengaged and pray for them to have peace of mind. Everyone deserves that.

9. Crazy Mirrors

Never wish ill-will on the victim - that's what they are doing to you. As much as you want to "get" them, it will only perpetuate the game. This is not about good vs. evil. You don't want to be happy when they get put in their place because that is their mindset. This is a hard one because it requires a lot of self-awareness.

10. Punchin' Pillows

Anger only perpetuates the problem. Even though we can't help feeling it, it's important to "neutralize" yourself as soon as possible by keeping it to yourself and rationalizing all the other tips above. If you already got angry, be patient and loving with yourself that you can get over it! Believe in your own strength.

Feel free to share this. I may someday publish it, but have never done that before. I really just want to help out the rest of us to not fall into the trap of being a victim. Fear is accepting no responsibility for yourself, which is truly selfish.

Thanks! Hope you enjoyed this...

*Terri Waterman
CEO, Surreal Concepts
www.surrealconcepts.com*

Thoughts that Make You Go Hmmm...on Choosing Our Perspective

**"The Victim curses the wind.
The Survivor waits for it to change.
The Navigator adjusts the sails."**

"You have to take it as it happens, but you should try to make it happen the way you want to take it."

- German Proverb

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"We all know people who, under duress, throw up their hands and cry, 'How can this be happening to me?' Such people see themselves as victims, and living through hardship carries no lessons for them. But resilient people devise constructs about their suffering to create some sort of meaning for themselves and others."

- Diane L. Coutu, "How Resilience Works," *Harvard Business Review*

"Throughout our research, we were continually reminded of the 'hardiness' research studies done by the International Committee for the Study of Victimization. These studies looked at people who had suffered serious adversity - cancer patients, prisoners of war, accident victims, and so forth - and survived. They found that people fell generally into three categories; those who were permanently dispirited by the event, those who got their life back to normal, and those who used the experience as a defining event that made them stronger. The good-to-great companies were like those in the third group, with the 'hardiness factor'."

- Jim Collins, *Good to Great*

"A positive outlook can actually short-circuit the virus responsible for the common cold, researchers from Carnegie Mellon University recently found. The doctors squirted rhinovirus (the cold bug) up the noses of 111 happy people and 112 grumpy ones. Volunteers with the sunniest dispositions were the least likely to get sick. Negative people grouched about their sniffles even when they had no signs of actual viral infection."

- Michael Kesterton, *The Globe and Mail*

Improvement Points Subscribers' Top Picks for February

Of the eleven short quotes with links to full articles that were e-mailed out as complimentary **Improvement Points** last month, the most popular with subscribers were:

"Continuous personal improvement means we often outgrow our own standards and what we previously thought was acceptable. A dull author once complained to William Dean Howells the 19th century editor of Atlantic Monthly (he encouraged a number of writers including Mark Twain and Henry James). 'I don't seem to write as well as I used to,' the mediocre writer grumbled. 'Oh yes you do...indeed you do,' Howells reassured him, 'It's your taste that is improving'."

- from *Blazing Our Own Improvement Path*

www.clemmer.net/excerpts/blazing_path.shtml



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"One of the best indicators of the strength of a team is the "We to Me" ratio. How often do team members and leaders use "we" and "ours" instead of "I", "me" and "mine" in their conversations?"

- from *Harnessing the Power of Teams*

www.clemmer.net/excerpts/harness_teams.shtml

"Follow-up on training sessions with on-the-job coaching and support from managers. A Motorola Inc. study has found that those plants where quality improvement training was reinforced by senior management got a \$33 return on every dollar invested. Plants providing the same training with no top management follow-up produced a negative return on investment."

- from *Why Most Training Fails*

http://www.clemmer.net/excerpts/why_most.shtml

Subscribe or view the archives by topic area here: www.clemmer.net/improvement.shtml.

Practical Leadership Strategies for Peak Performance

Registrations are building for the Kitchener session of my new two-day workshop, combining the personal development approaches of *Growing the Distance: Timeless Principles for Personal, Career, and Family Success* using those same principles in leading others as outlined in my new book, *The Leader's Digest: Timeless Principles for Team and Organization Success*. Entitled, **Practical Leadership Strategies for Peak Performance**, I have extensively updated, revised, and added to this material for this practical application workshop. [Click here for registration and an overview](#) (text and/or audio) of what we'll cover in **Practical Leadership Strategies for Peak Performance**.

If you would like to explore customized, in-house adaptations of this material for your team or organization, drop me an e-mail at Jim.Clemmer@Clemmer.net.

I would love to hear from you on any of the discussions raised in this issue of the *Leader Letter*...or any other matters concerning my work. Of course, I especially welcome conversations exploring how I might help you or your team/organization with a keynote presentation, management team retreat, or workshop.

Send me an e-mail at Jim.Clemmer@Clemmer.net or call me directly at (519) 748-5968.

I hope to connect with you again next month!

Jim

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