



JIM CLEMMER

Practical Leadership:
From Inspiration to Application

Jim Clemmer's Leader Letter

November 2008, Issue 68

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As if we needed even more proof of how interconnected our world has become, the current financial crunch making headlines around the world is dramatically underscoring the point. Whether leading ourselves, our teams, our organizations, or our countries, when times are darkest, true leadership shines brightest.

Leaders don't sugar-coat or avoid facing tough problems (or moose-on-the-table). Strong leaders make people hopeful by focusing everyone on "what could be" as a counterbalance to "what is." They know how powerful and self-fulfilling the Law of Attraction truly is. So they set themselves up to attract the behaviors, circumstances, and events that ultimately lead to success.

Leading in Turbulent Times

In the midst of October's economic uncertainty and turbulence, a reporter sent me an e-mail asking what leaders need to do in order to keep their business on track and employees reassured. Here are her questions and my responses:

What do a firm's executives and leaders need to do to reassure staff and maintain productivity?

Leaders need to provide opportunities for staff to vent their fears and concerns and ask questions about how economic turmoil might impact their organization. These could be a series of town-hall type meetings or more informal chats over coffee, lunch, or just hallway conversations. During turbulent times leaders must dramatically ramp up the amount of time they spend out of their offices talking with staff, key customers, and any other critical constituents. Leaders should be as open and transparent as they can

about what's going on in their markets/organizations and share what information they have.

Like nature, communication abhors a vacuum. In the absence of concrete information and real data, people will make it up. And since negativity and fear feeds on itself during uncertain times, people tend to feed the rumor mill with catastrophic scenarios of impending doom.

Strong leaders make people hopeful and focus everyone on what could be. The tricky balance is to point out the rays of hope amidst the doom and gloom without being Pollyannaish or looking like you're hiding your head in the sand. Issues or problems should be faced squarely. But they need to be framed with a can-do attitude. Focus on building confidence to counterbalance all the drag of



negativity and disaster. Use stories or examples of how the organization, you, members of the audience, or others have faced similar situations or worse in the past and how those tough times were overcome – leaving everything stronger as a result.

See "Navigating Change and Adversity" at <http://jimclemmer.com/content/view/346/9> or http://jimclemmer.com/component/option,com_seyret/Itemid,114/catid,2 (Navigating Change video clip) for more.

What is a realistic course of action for a firm leader to address business conditions, to evolve with changing situations, and to maintain staff morale?

Increase participation and involvement as broadly as possible. Find ways to include as many people as you can in identifying and working the key problems facing the organization. If this work is focused on strategic issues that will truly make a difference it will help to focus everyone's nervous energy, and increase everyone's sense of having control over their own fate, while reinforcing a feeling of progress and forward momentum.

A big fear for most staff is losing their job at a time when finding another one and paying bills may be difficult. Strong leaders look ahead and prepare for the worst while helping people focus on bringing about the best possible outcomes. Go to <http://jimclemmer.com/content/view/223/9> for my views on how wise managers treat lay-offs as a last resort.

What are some of the classic mistakes leaders make in tough financial times like the one we are currently experiencing?

Adding to doom and gloom with fear and a negative attitude.

Jumping to downsizing and layoffs without fully exploring the myriad of alternatives that are much more inclusive and treat staff as partners in finding ways to reduce costs rather than "overhead" to be chucked overboard like useless ballast as the ship is sinking.

Running closed-door meetings in their offices with just other managers. This feeds the rumor mill of fear and impending doom.

Not communicating. People need to know what's happening "out there" and what the organization is doing about it.

Failing to realize that they are being minutely scrutinized for any signs of distress or coming disaster. During a previous recession a CEO was seen on the elevator holding my second book, [*Firing on All Cylinders: The Service/Quality System for High-Powered Corporate Performance*](#), which he was reading. He didn't realize that as he held the book with the title facing outward his hand covered up all of the title except for the word "firing." Within hours rumors raced through the building that the CEO was planning mass layoffs. In fact, he and the senior team were working on a plan to reduce costs through quality improvement and



reverse sliding revenues through increased customer service. The effort succeeded and the company not only didn't let anyone go, they actually hired more people over the next few months.

Thoughts that Make You Go Hmmm...on Leading in Turbulent Times

"A leader is a dealer in hope."

- Napoleon Bonaparte

"I don't like being afraid. It scares me."

- Major Margaret J. "Hot Lips" Houlihan, fictional character in the American Sitcom M*A*S*H

"In Japan, there is a common good luck charm called a Daruma Doll. It is named after a Buddhist monk who, according to legend, sat so long in meditation that his arms and legs disappeared. The Daruma Doll is egg shaped with a heavy, rounded bottom. When you knock it over it always stands back up. Lucky people are similar to the Daruma Doll. It is not that they never encounter ill fortune, but rather, when bad luck happens, lucky people are able to stand straight back up."

- Richard Wiseman, *The Luck Factor: Change Your Luck - and Change your Life*

"In times like these, it is helpful to remember that there have always been times like these."

- Paul Harvey, American radio commentator

"The problems of the world cannot possibly be solved by skeptics or cynics whose horizons are limited by the obvious realities. We need men who can dream of things that never were."

- John F. Kennedy, American president



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"Hope has been shown to be the key ingredient of resilience in survivors of traumas ranging from prison camps to natural disasters. Many studies have shown that people who score higher on measures of hope also cope better with injuries, diseases, and physical pain; perform better in school; and prove more competitive in sports.... People must see that change is possible and how they can engage personally in that change.... Hopeful work groups are most often composed of individuals whose worth to the organization has been affirmed, who perceive an openness on the part of management, and who enjoy an authentic sense of connection with their colleagues and with the organization's mission.... If you are an executive trying to lead an organization through change, know that hope can be a potent force in your favor. And it's yours to give."

- Harry Hutson and Barbara Perry authors of *Putting Hope to Work: Five Principles to Activate Your Organization's Most Powerful Resource*

"A bend in the road is not the end of the road - unless you fail to make the turn."
- Unknown

"Leading @ the Speed of Change" Public Workshops

We're once again offering a rare open or public version of my most popular workshop, "Leading @ the Speed of Change: How to Align People, Processes, and Personal Effectiveness for Continuous Success." As you can see on our website at <http://jimclemmer.com/content/view/858>, this workshop is highly tailored to our Client's internal use. I only do one of these more general or public sessions a year. The next one will be June 2 and 3, 2009 right here in my hometown of Kitchener, Ontario (45 minutes West of Toronto's international airport) at the Holiday Inn. [Click here](#) for hotel location and details.

I am currently revamping the agenda and focus of this workshop to reflect updates to our material from recent Client work, last spring's "[Breaking Through the Bull](#)" workshop tour (based on my newest book, [Moose on the Table](#)), and these turbulent times that call for even stronger leadership. Details will follow in next month's issue of *The Leader Letter*. In the meantime, you can mark your calendar for June 2 and 3 and begin to think about who else on your team and in your organization would benefit from attending this session in a group. Groups of five or more receive special pricing and their own table(s) to keep assessments and application discussions tailored to your own team or organization.

If you'd like to discuss how I might tailor a half, one, or two-day workshop to your team or organization on dealing with change or leading in turbulent times go to <http://jimclemmer.com/content/view/646/119> for contact details.



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Consulting Corner: Steps to Culture Change

Culture change has become a major initiative for many of The CLEMMER Group's ongoing consulting and training Clients. Last month our Senior Vice President, Scott Schweyer, began a series of articles sharing his experiences on how he and his team of leadership and organization development specialists have successfully helped many of our Clients dramatically shift their culture toward higher effectiveness. Go to <http://jimclemmer.com/content/view/965> to read that first article entitled "[What Impacts an Organization's Culture?](http://jimclemmer.com/content/view/965)"

Scott's next article in the series is "[Steps to Culture Change](http://jimclemmer.com/content/view/1000/)" available at <http://jimclemmer.com/content/view/1000/>. This article is built around a simple implementation or how-to model for leading successful culture change.

Have You Been Site Seeing?

We have substantially upgraded the look, feel, and navigation of our web site. If you haven't dropped by yet, please do pay us a visit at www.jimclemmer.com.

One of our recent additions to the site is a series of short (60 - 90-second) video clips on our home page in each of our major sections (Online Book Store, Services, Articles & Videos, and Free Newsletters) with me acting as your tour guide. The clips give you a quick overview of the section and what we're trying to provide for you there.

Here are some of the bigger changes you'll find:

Re-Indexed Articles – We spent the better part of last summer rethinking how we could organize the articles on the site. Under our new system all my articles are now filed by common or popular subject areas under four simple categories. This will make it easier than ever to find the resources you need when you need them. And when you get to an article, you can now leave your feedback right on the page with our new comment feature. Review the new index at <http://jimclemmer.com/content/view/25/76>.

Integrated Blog – We've upgraded our blogging software. Updated every Tuesday and Thursday, it's a great way to join in the conversation. And if you subscribe, you'll get the postings (along with reader responses) delivered right to your inbox. Come by and check it out at www.jimclemmer.com/blog.

Take a Leadership Quiz – You'll find [ten leadership quizzes](#) right on the home page of the site. They can track how well you're doing as a leader and provide suggestions on how to improve yourself, your team, or your organization!



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As you go through the site you'll see hundreds of minor tweaks that we hope will keep you coming back to jimclemmer.com for practical leadership tips, techniques, and resources.

More Site Seeing

During turbulent times it's important to have access to as much information as you can get your hands on. Over the years the Free Management Library – managementhelp.org – has certainly sent my site a lot of traffic by including some of my articles in their huge index. With 700 topics and over 6000(!) links to articles from around the web. This is a particularly great resource when uncertainty seems to be the rule of the day.

The Digital Revolution Continues

Last month I was happy to announce that *Moose on the Table* was launched as the very first business book available for the iPhone through the new App store at a very reasonable \$4.99. You can order it through [iTunes here](#).

This month I'm equally happy to announce that I've made both my *Leading in Turbulent Times* and *Firing on All Cylinders* audios available for purchase as downloads through our [online store](#). Along with the *Moose on the Table* audio book download, these two practical resources are now available to anyone with an internet connection anywhere in the world. And as they were created using the MP3 format, they will play on virtually any device (computer, iPod, MP3 player) on the market.

Drop by the [Audio Books page](#) of our store and see if these materials are right for you.

How Coachable Are You?

I recently worked with a senior management team implementing an extensive customer service improvement process throughout their division. They were effective and worked well as a team. But they also had so much higher potential that wasn't being realized. I was getting one-on-one comments from some team members that the leader's style was stifling debate and underutilizing the full power of their collective efforts.

In between sessions I met with "Frank," the divisional general manager and team leader, to test his openness to "moose hunting" (revealing the major issues holding back team effectiveness). He was quite interested in helping himself and his team break through to a higher level of leadership. So I facilitated an anonymous environment for team members to raise key issues they felt were holding back the team, and weighted each issue through a voting process. The top three issues concerned the team dynamics rippling from Frank's leadership style. Because of his receptivity and interest in learning how to improve, the team then had a very frank and fruitful discussion with sensitive and direct feedback going straight to Frank on how he could be more effective. Everyone described the session as a breakthrough in their communications.



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I followed up the retreat with this e-mail to Frank:

I especially appreciated how open you were to coaching and getting feedback from your team. In our business we talk about the "coachability" of Clients and executives we work with. It's a critical indicator of their ability to learn, adapt, and increase their leadership effectiveness. Your non-defensiveness, encouragement of candid comments, and push-back are great signs of your coachability. Following through with this behavior and building upon what we started last week is now crucial to your team's success.

Here are a few further suggestions for you:

Hold back your opinion when you're trying to get consensus from your team or you want to foster a strong debate on their views.

Ask more questions to probe deeper into what a team member is saying before assuming and jumping in with your response.

Ask for the team member's opinion when a problem or issue is raised. Try to support, coach, or build on his or her suggestion. This switches you much more into a developmental or coaching role.

Look for ways to continue working on the team and its dynamics.

Is your leadership style helping or hindering your team? How do you know? How coachable are you?

More on the Dangerous "Natural Talent" Myth

In last November's issue I wrote a section entitled "Powerful Proof That Leaders Are Made, Not Born" (go to <http://jimclemmer.com/news/nov2007.htm>). In this piece I wrote of my 30+ years of deep belief and personal experiences that leaders are made not born and provided links to four of my articles expanding on that theme. I also quoted from the powerful *Harvard Business Review* article entitled "The Making of an Expert" reporting on a major study that said "consistent and overwhelming evidence showing that *experts* (including strong leaders) *are always made, not born* (their emphasis)."

It's a very dangerous excuse to believe that leaders are born not made. That handy excuse allows me off the hook and gives an easy out to the difficult work of building leadership skills – or emotional intelligence (another area with strong proof that it can be improved).

Fortune magazine just published an article entitled "Why Talent is Overrated" (Geoff Colvin, Senior Editor at Large, October 21, 2008) that addresses this critical self and leadership development question. The introductory subtitle to Geoff's piece reads, "The conventional wisdom about 'natural' talent is a myth. The real path to great performance is a matter of choice." Pretty powerful stuff that kicks out the "I am not a natural leader" crutch from those who aren't willing to change!



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The article gives an example of two young men who started working together at Proctor & Gamble in the late seventies as unremarkable young recruits who did not stand out in any way early in their careers. Geoff quotes one of them as saying "We were voted the two guys probably least likely to succeed." He goes on to write, "These two young men are of interest to us now for only one reason: They are Jeffrey Immelt and Steven Ballmer, who before age 50 would become CEOs of two of the world's most valuable corporations, General Electric and Microsoft. Contrary to what any reasonable person would have expected when they were new recruits, they reached the apex of corporate achievement."

Geoff then outlines key steps in what researchers call "deliberate practice" as the path to building leadership skills.

Are you victimizing yourself with the nature versus nurture excuse? Are you trying to find "talented people" rather than coaching them along the difficult and rocky paths of continuous personal growth and leadership skill development?

Use Improvement Points for Your Continuous Improvement

[Improvement Points](#) is another service I started a few years ago to bring timely and inspirational quotes from my articles to readers three times a week. Touching on topics that will help you become a better leader of yourself, your team and your organization, they are a very popular resource for people around the world. Each complimentary Improvement Point links directly to a full article on our web site. If you'd like to read more about that day's Improvement Point, you can choose to click through for a quick shot of inspiration and motivation. 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 October:

"At the core of a high performance culture is a strong leader who knows where he or she wants to lead their organization, but is highly flexible and opportunistic in pulling teams together to try new approaches, to experiment, and to learn (as well as occasionally fail) their way to success."
- from Jim Clemmer's article, "More Change Demands More Leadership"

[Read the full article now!](#)

<http://jimclemmer.com/content/view/945/>



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"What gets people really excited about their jobs? What inspires the passion and commitment that translates into exceptional performance? It isn't a process of management controls. It's a leadership function that instills in people an emotional stake in what they do."

- from Jim Clemmer's article, "Emotional Empowerment Builds Commitment"

[Read the full article now!](#)

<http://jimclemmer.com/content/view/917/>

"As our organizations struggle with change, we can either be navigators, survivors or victims. Our leadership response doesn't depend on our position; it depends on our choices."

- from Jim Clemmer's article, "Stop Whining and Start Leading"

[Read the full article now!](#)

<http://jimclemmer.com/content/view/564/>

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.

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

Jim

Please post or forward this newsletter to colleagues, Clients, or associates you think might be interested – or on a 'need to grow' basis. If you received this newsletter from someone else, and would like to subscribe, click here: <http://jimclemmer.com/content/view/745>.

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