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I Predict...More Unpredictability

It's a crazy time of year. A time for futurists, forecasters, and analysts to line up with seers, fortune tellers, and prophets to gravely tell us what 2009 has in store. Instead of tea leaves, animal entrails, and crystal balls, the "experts" will use data, charts, and complex theories.

And they'll mostly be wrong.

It's perfectly natural for part of us to want to know what the future has in store. Of course if we knew precisely what pleasant surprises lay ahead and nasty unavoidable crisis' would hit us, we'd be so filled with the fear of impending doom or so full of anticipation that we would not live in the present and enjoy the moment.

One of my favorite books of the past decade is *The Fortune Sellers*. The author, William Sherden, studied the dismal history – and huge multi-billion dollar industry – of forecasting (he calls it the second oldest profession). He concludes "of these sixteen types of forecast, only two – one-day-ahead weather forecasts and the aging of the population – can be counted on; the rest are about as reliable as the fifty-fifty odds in flipping a coin. And only one of the sixteen – short-term weather forecasts – has any scientific foundation." When I hear an economist or anyone other than a forecaster making predictions a voice in my head says "you have no idea what's going to happen."

I've found there are two ways of dealing with our uncertain future – dealing with life. One is to create our own future. The other is to build flexible and adaptable lives, teams, and organizations. Both are central to leadership.

Slow Down to Increase Your Speed

I recently sat through a high energy presentation given by a leading expert on knowledge management. He poured out a numbing array of statistics showing that the world's knowledge was growing at mind blowing exponential rates. The gist of his presentation was that we needed to re-train our brains to absorb more and more information at rapidly accelerating rates. His goal seemed to be to exhaust and frighten us into buying his knowledge management approaches so we could cram more stuff into our craniums.



This is dead wrong. He was peddling dangerous misconceptions leading to high stress, attention deficiencies, and unhappiness. In these times of dramatic, dislocating and rapid change we need to step back to step ahead. Otherwise we could end up like the befuddled pilot who told his passengers that "we're lost, but making great time!" What if you're racing down the road that leads right into a swamp...or over a cliff?

I first started researching, writing, and speaking about dealing with rapid change during my Achieve Group days in 1985. The first chapter of my first book (The VIP Strategy) focused on how our world was in the midst of a huge multi-decade shift. Change author, Alvin Toffler, called our current times "a hinge of history" when everything about the way our world works dramatically pivots to something new, different...and totally unpredictable.

The growing mountain of research on time effectiveness, strategic focus, dealing with our overflowing e-mail in-boxes, happiness, stress, relationships, coaching, and so on clearly show us that less is more. Paradoxically, we get more done, build stronger teams, and increase personal and organizational effectiveness by stepping back regularly to assess our progress, savor our successes, celebrate achievements, and set new priorities.

Now's the Time to Increase Learning and Development

During the darkest times strong leaders shine the brightest. Successful long-term investors like Sir John Templeton and Warren Buffet "buy at the point of maximum pessimism." That's how they created incredible value and wealth.

Successful team and organizational leaders invest in leadership development when it's most needed. Now's the time to engage and energize frontline staff, and counteract all the gloom and doom pervading our news media. We have to find innovative new ways to build customer service, increase strategic focus, and use our precious and limited resource – time – more effectively. Do this and you can revitalize and reshape your team/organizational culture, and involve everyone in streamlining operations. Tough times don't last, but tough leadership does.

"Leading @ the Speed of Change: Navigating Turbulent Times" on June 2 and 3, 2009 is a very rare two-day public workshop designed to help individuals and management teams address our most challenging issues and successfully navigate the choppy waters of uncertainty. This is my only date for open or public versions of this workshop in 2009. No others are planned. If you're in Southern Ontario or the Greater Toronto Area this is a unique opportunity to bring your team to one of my sessions (if you have more than six team members, we should talk about an in-house session customized to your organization). The Kitchener Holiday Inn is only forty-five minutes from Toronto's international airport.



For everyone outside Ontario or Canada, June is a beautiful time to visit our wonderful little piece of heaven here on earth. Niagara Falls is only ninety minutes away and many other tourist attractions are even closer. Of course, you can always go further north and look for our famous moose!

[Click here for our agenda, outcomes you can expect, pricing, and other information.](#)

Thoughts That Make You Go Hmmm...on Change and Uncertainty

"Our wealth, health, and very existence are all extremely provisional. Here today and gone tomorrow. This is the way the world is and the way it always will be."

- Punnadhammo Bhikkhu, Buddhist monk

"Life is a series of natural and spontaneous changes. Don't resist them – that only creates sorrow. Let reality be reality."

- Lao-Tzu, ancient Chinese philosopher

"We are forever looking for a cure for our ills. We do this by placing ourselves in the position of manager, of thus managing change. Unless it is managed, something is wrong. But our real unconscious and underlying wish is to find a cure for the impermanence of life, and for that there is no remedy."

- David Whyte, *The Heart Aroused: Poetry and Preservation of the Soul in Corporate America*

"Forecasting is very difficult – especially if it is about the future. He who lives by the crystal ball soon learns to eat ground glass."

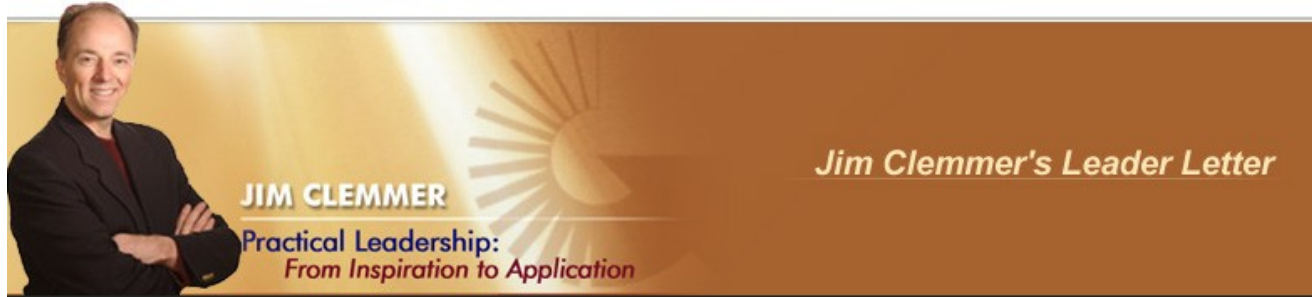
- Edgar Fielder, quoted in *Why Things Go Wrong* by Laurence J. Peter

"Ways of dealing with the future; try to ignore it, try to predict it, try to control it, try to respond to it. Our experience shows us that the first three ways just will not work. That's why 3Mers all over Canada are working vigorously to respond to the future."

- Plaque hanging in London, Ontario lobby of 3M Canada

"Unceasingly contemplate the generation of all things through change and accustom thyself to the thought that the nature of the universe delights above all in changing the things that exist and making new ones of the same pattern, for everything that exists is the seed of that which shall come out of it."

- Marcus Aurelius, Roman emperor



"What, sir, would you make a ship sail against the wind and currents by lighting a bonfire under her deck? I pray you excuse me. I have no time to listen to such nonsense."

- Napoleon Bonaparte to Robert Fulton (U.S. engineer who created the first commercial steamboat)

Leading an Organization in Turbulent Times

"A CEO was seen by his staff reading Clemmer's book, [Firing On All Cylinders: The Service/Quality System for High-Powered Corporate Performance](#). What the CEO didn't realize was he was holding the book so that only the word 'Firing' in the title was visible. Within hours, the CEO's staff had spread the rumor that the CEO was planning a layoff.

So what does the story have to do with leading in turbulent times? Clemmer uses the tale to make a point about key factors for leadership: positive attitude and open, positive communication."

This is a quote from an article written by Tom Caldecott for [AllBusiness.com](#), a division of Dun and Bradstreet, based on his interview with me. This stemmed from my work with The Manufacturers Resource Centre in Bethlehem, PA. [Click here to read the full article](#) with my suggestions for leading in turbulent times.

Consulting Corner: Business Practices to Support Your Desired Culture

Part Three in a Series

Culture change has become a highly popular topic as organizations work to increase their performance – and really live their values. In his third installment of the series, [Business Practices to Support Your Desired Culture](#), our Senior Vice President of Consulting and Training, Scott Schweyer, outlines what he and his group of specialists and experts have found is key to success.

In all my years leading The Achieve Group/Zenger Miller and now The CLEMMER Group, I have worked with dozens of consultants. Scott is exceptionally strong in his intuitive ability to help Clients make the changes that need to happen in order to dramatically shift their culture toward higher effectiveness.

Read Scott's other articles:

[Steps to Culture Change](#)

[What Impacts an Organization's Culture?](#)



Sharing Travel Costs for Western Canada

I have two trips firmed up for Alberta in the coming months. One is the last week of February. The other is early to mid-May. I also have a trip scheduled for Vancouver the first week of February.

If you're interested in sharing travel costs for a keynote, workshop, or management team retreat, contact Heather at (519) 748-6561 or Heather@Clemmer.net to explore this further.

Special Guest Article: Seven Foundations for Effective Leadership

As shocking as it may seem to some, I'm not the only expert on leadership out there. Each month, I plan to introduce you to others who are contributing to this growing field through guest articles. If you like what you read, feel free to visit their web sites and see what they have to offer. This month's guest is Bob 'Idea Man' Hooey.

Enjoy,

Jim

"These Seven Foundations for Effective Leadership served as the core part of my keynote for 600 plus Alberta mayors, reeves, and councilors at their annual convention.

President Abraham Lincoln led the Northern States through one of the bloodiest and darkest pages in US history. He envisioned the concept of keeping both sides together as something worth fighting for...and fight he did! He did not live to see his dream of a re-unified United States take place; but his focused leadership laid the foundations for this outcome.

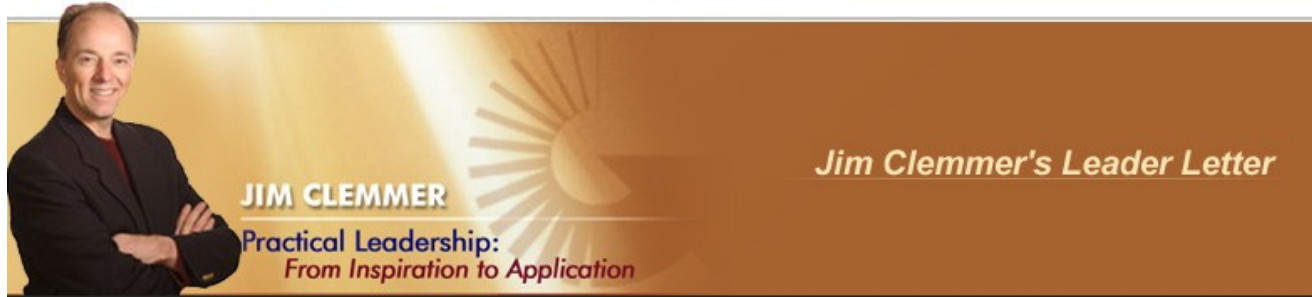
Today, we are dealing with tremendous economic, political, and personal pressure and challenges. More than ever, we need to see these foundational principles of effective leadership demonstrated throughout our companies, communities, and countries.

Example – people need to be able to depend on your leadership

Today, more than ever, people are looking for leaders who will lead by example in their dealings with people and their lifestyles.

Communication – people need to know what you are saying

Today, more than ever, people are looking for clarity and consistency in our written and oral communications. They are looking for honesty and openness in the dialogue they have with us as leaders.



Ability – you need to be capable of leading other people

Today, more than ever, people are looking for more than a slick appearance. They want content and proven ability they can trust to get them through the increasing challenges of the 21st Century.

Motivation – you need to know why you want to be a leader

Today, more than ever, people want to know why you are doing what you are doing and so do you! A simple 'trust me' won't cut it. This is even more noticeable with the 16 - 24 year olds who are not so affectionately dubbed, "Generation WHY?"

Authority – people need to respond to your leadership

Today, more than ever, people want to be able to see demonstrated commitment and power in your decisions as well as authority in your actions.

Strategy – you need to know where you are going

Today, more than ever, people want to know you have a plan; one that is well thought out, covering all the contingencies and challenges. They want to know the details of that strategy before they agree to follow you.

Love and compassion – you need to care for the people around you

Today, more than ever, people want to know and see that you truly care about them, their needs, their concerns, their fears, their dreams, and their well-being. Lip service, hype, or idle words will not cut it on the 21st Century leadership track.

Analyze or revisit your 'current' leadership skills in light of the above seven foundations. Those you would hope to lead certainly will be and they are constantly judging your actions, attitudes, and motivation. What do you see? Are there areas where improvement is needed? When will you start and what will you do? We need your leadership more than ever, today!"

© 2008 Bob 'Idea Man' Hooey. Used with permission of the author. www.ideaman.net Bob helps leaders effectively equip and motivate their teams to grow and to win. He works with leaders across North America including Canada's 50 Best Managed Companies. Bob recently co-authored [In the Company of Leaders](#) with the help of 40 top selling leadership authors including Jim Clemmer. Follow the above link to purchase at a special rate.

(<http://www.inthecompanyofleaders.com/Friends-CofL.htm>)



New Feature on Our New Web: The Leader Letter Index is Now Archived

Nearly six years of items from The Leader Letter (with this issue we've just hit seventy issues) are now archived by topic areas for much more convenient browsing. Using the same index as our [articles library](#), our new archive index files past items from The Leader Letter by common or popular subject areas. These are listed under four major categories of General, Organization Improvement, Self-Leadership, and Leading Others. This will make it easier than ever to find the resources you need when you need them.

So whether you're searching for material on Culture Change, Change Management, Attitude and Outlook, Employee Engagement and Empowerment, or dozens of other topics, go to <http://jimclemmer.com/newsletter> and find what you want quickly and easily.

Get It Sizzling Hot Off My Blog

Earlier this month I began a new process for integrating [my blog](#) and The Leader Letter. Instead of sitting down once per month to write The Leader Letter for the upcoming month, I'll post items in the blog every Tuesday and Thursday. These blog entries and possible discussions from readers will then form the core of the following month's issue of The Leader Letter. So you can sign up to get notification/RSS feeds of each Tuesday and Thursday posting as they happen and/or you can read them the following month.

Most Popular December 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 its title to see the full article. 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 December:

"So much of what a manager does makes it difficult for people to get their work done." I am from head office and I am here to help you" sends the snicker meter over the red line in many organizations. Too often managers have made it harder for people on the frontlines to get their job done. Strong coaches start by building agreement or buy-in to roles and goals. Then they flip things around and serve their teams and organizations."

- from Jim Clemmer's article, "Leaders Handle Performance Problems"

[Read the full article now!](#)

<http://jimclemmer.com/content/view/258/31/>



"Low service-performing organizations set themselves up for failure by raising expectations to attract new customers. They over-promise and under-deliver. High-performing organizations know that one secret of success is to under-promise and over-deliver. That is how they build reputations for service and keep customers coming back."

- from Jim Clemmer's article, "Don't Promise Too Much"

[Read the full article now!](#)

<http://jimclemmer.com/content/view/132/31/>

"Before I can have, I must do. Before I can do, I must be. This critical sequence of Be-Do-Have is at the center of authentic leadership. It all starts with being a leader."

- from Jim Clemmer's article, "Being True to Me"

[Read the full article now!](#)

<http://jimclemmer.com/content/view/366/31/>

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>.