



Practical Leadership:

Inspiring Action, Achieving Results

Jim Clemmer's Leader Letter

December 2003, Issue 9 ~ View on-line at www.clemmer.net

Page 1 of 6

In this issue...

- **Forming Leadership Habits**
- **What's New? Who Cares? What Really Matters is What Works!**
- **The Great Debate: Giving a Team Member an Attitude Adjustment**
- **We Can't Separate Personal and Professional**
- **Thought Provoking Quotes**
- **Top Improvement Points**
- **Could Your Organization Be More Customer-Focused?**
- **Give the Gift of Leadership**

Forming Leadership Habits: Leadership Tips and Techniques

There are about as many views and definitions of what encompasses "leadership" as there are experts in this field. There is one point that most leadership researchers and developers agree on: leaders are made, not born. Leaders are rarely naturals. But the ultimate level of mastery is to make it look natural.

The great Italian opera tenor, Luciano Pavarotti was an average singer in the boys' choir in Italy when he was a teenager. The only reason they let him in the choir was because his father ran it. He wanted to be spoken of with the same reverence and respect as his fellow countryman, Enrico Caruso. So he studied, and he practiced, and he trained, until he slowly got there.

Not all learners are leaders. But the research clearly shows that the strongest leaders are continuous learners. They are self-made leaders.

Here are a few habit-forming tips and techniques for leadership or personal development:

- ❖ Spend your time with optimistic and growing people. Unless you're trying to help them, avoid people with stunted personal growth, the Victimitis Virus, or the Pessimism Plague.
- ❖ Develop or join a network of colleagues who are as interested in personal learning and development as you are. This can be a powerful source of learning from other people's experiences. It's also a great place for you to reflect on your own experiences and articulate your improvement plans.
- ❖ A group that meets regularly is an excellent forum for making public declarations or even "contracts" around your personal improvement plans. This approach makes it much harder to back away from forming tough, new habits.
- ❖ Use Benjamin Franklin's "method for progressing." He identified thirteen virtues he wanted to develop. Each week he worked on one of the virtues for a total of "four courses (cycles) in a year." Each night before retiring, Franklin reflected on and recorded his progress on that week's virtue.
- ❖ If we can't manage our time and discipline ourselves to invest time in personal improvement, we won't grow into ever-stronger leaders. We could easily become a victim of the changes swirling around us. We need to get control of our time, priorities, and destiny. We need to do it soon. Tomorrow is arriving much quicker than it used to.



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Page 2 of 6

For many of the above reasons, I have evolved my leadership workshops into a more intensive development process. Besides adding hundreds of extensive new practical approaches from *The Leader's Digest*, I am now providing a longer term improvement process with a two-day workshop as the beginning. Learn all about my new **Practical Leadership Strategies for Peak Performance** [here: www.clemmer.net/events/pls/pls.shtml](http://www.clemmer.net/events/pls/pls.shtml).

What's New? Who Cares? What Really Matters is What Works!

I am often asked what's new in leadership or organization development. But what's most important to improvement isn't what's new. It's what works. Ultimately it's our improvement action that determines our performance results. The effectiveness of that *action* hinges upon our follow through.

Our learning and leadership or personal development is highly dependent on our habits of performance review, assessment, and reflection. It's not very trendy. It isn't the latest fad. But it works.

Periodically, we need to get away from the daily flurry of activities, step back, and look at the bigger picture. We need to reassess if we're on the right track, or if we're making good time – in the wrong direction. We need to look at our full improvement effort and discuss, debate, and decide if it has the right focus, priorities, approaches, and the like. We need to celebrate progress and reenergize everyone to push forward even harder. And we need to set new plans and directions for the next stage of our improvement process.

**The Great Debate:
Giving a Team Member an Attitude Adjustment**

Last month I reported on how a reader handled a situation with an administrative support person who often brought down the mood of the whole office. You can read/refresh the story [here](#).

Shortly after the November *Leader Letter* was e-mailed, I received the following response from another reader who felt very strongly about how "Linda" handled the situation. "Susan" raised a number of very good points:

I think Linda has made way too many assumptions.

First off: the setting. She has taken an employee to lunch. Those in management often feel that the employee should automatically see this as a perk. Wake up! If the employee is unhappy, the last thing they want to do is spend "their" time with anyone from the company! Lunch, breaks, holidays, etc. are sacred time to most employees, and more so for those that are unhappy. We, as management should recognize this.

**Practical Leadership:***Inspiring Action, Achieving Results***Jim Clemmer's Leader Letter**December 2003, Issue 9 ~ View on-line at www.clemmer.net

Page 3 of 6

So now she has an employee "cornered" in a restaurant and begins asking her personal questions. "Where are you going?" "What do you believe in?" The employee has every right to feel pressured to reveal personal information. Frankly, it is none of Linda's business what her employee's personal goals are! If this were a friendly conversation over a glass of wine, between two friends/associates, then the information is voluntary. If Linda had positioned this differently...i.e. was telling the employee what a good job she had been doing... and that she (Linda) would like to help get to her next career level...then Linda could ask if the employee would like to share her personal goals. Linda has put this woman, who is already unhappy, in an isolated location (a restaurant of Linda's choice and away from the familiarity of the office and fellow workers) and is now demanding information about her most private thoughts and aspirations.

When the employee did open up about her feelings, Linda gave the employee's comments absolutely no credence. She referred to it as "whining." Did it ever occur to her that these comments might indeed hold some validity? Linda's own arrogance could blind her from an opportunity to fix a much bigger office problem. She pointed out that someone was coming late and leaving early... getting all the overtime. Maybe this employee has a right to feel overlooked or unappreciated. Perhaps someone else was overstepping his or her position.

Then the employee goes on to say that she is the only one to institute fun into an office but didn't get any co-operation from fellow employees. Linda talked circles around this employee until she outright told her that...

- 1. She (the employee) was responsible for the attitude of others in the office*
- 2. Quit feeling sorry for herself*
- 3. Support all staff unconditionally*

Is it any wonder this employee feels taken advantage of and under appreciated? She is being held accountable for not only her own attitude but everyone else's. "Make everyone else happy"... "support them unconditionally"... "you don't have a right to your own feelings". All of this to help the bigger picture...i.e. make Linda's job run more smoothly. At no point were any of this employee's concerns addressed or validated. At no point did anyone acknowledge the frustration she was feeling.

I am trying to learn to be a good manager. So far the most beneficial "laws" I've learned are...

- a. If the situation doesn't make sense, you probably don't have all the facts*
- b. There is a "truth" to be gleaned from every situation...take the time to listen (without talking)*

Unlike many technical issues, there are rarely any right answers for leading people. I don't know Linda, her administrative support person, the culture of their office, nor the other players involved. These are all key factors.

Susan raises important issues here. But has she overacted to Linda's approach? What's your opinion? Please e-mail me your thoughts or experiences with similar situations. My e-mail address is Jim.Clemmer@Clemmer.net.

**Practical Leadership:***Inspiring Action, Achieving Results***Jim Clemmer's Leader Letter**December 2003, Issue 9 ~ View on-line at www.clemmer.net

Page 4 of 6

We Can't Separate Personal and Professional

On the eve of his retirement from Industry Canada, Brian Johnstone sent me a thoughtful and reflective e-mail. With his permission, I am sharing a portion of it that draws the critical connection between personal and professional success.

Jim, your articles continue to provide focus and inspiration for me. I'm preparing to retire and this gives me the opportunity to look back on a 34-year career in the Canadian Public Service. As I reflect on the events of past years, I can see the linkages between how we live our lives and how we run our businesses, something that escapes many people. The lessons on visioning, planning, doing and evaluation are applicable in both cases and contribute to our success or failure, happiness or despair.

I refer to your articles frequently in a column I write for an internal newsletter. The recurring theme of taking charge, taking responsibility, knowing what you want and planning how to get there have a place in the corporate board room as well as the personal career planning for each and every staff member. For some, this is a huge cultural shift, for others, it's business as usual.

The personal-professional connection is one that more people are making. It's about time. We are whole beings. We need to bring our entire selves to all parts of our lives. We lead from the inside out.

Leadership workshop participants constantly tell me that one of the major benefits they take away from our time together is how the timeless leadership principles we cover overlap with both their personal and professional lives. Trying to apply these principles in just one area of our life is like trying to have a no peeing section in a swimming pool. We can't separate what is invisible and interrelated.

**Thoughts that Make You Go Hmm...
on Developing Leadership Habits**

"Laugh at yourself, but don't ever aim your doubt at yourself. Be bold. When you embark for strange places, don't leave any of yourself safely on shore. Have the nerve to go into unexplored territory."

- Alan Alda, actor and director

"After ten years of exhaustive research, my colleagues and I learned that most people have serious misconceptions about what leads to star performance: 'Stars are smarter,' for instance, or 'Stars have certain types of personalities.' We then tested all these beliefs to determine which held up and which collapsed under hard scrutiny. The bottom line: Stars are made, not born."

- Robert E. Kelley, *How to be a Star at Work: 9 Breakthrough Strategies You Need to Succeed*



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Page 5 of 6

"We all have ability. The difference is how we use it."

- Stevie Wonder, singer and songwriter

"A study conducted at the Weatherhead School of Management of Case Western Reserve University by Professor Jane Wheeler found that of people who had developed learning agendas, those who tried out their new skills with many different people and spheres of their lives - not just at work, but also with family, church, and community groups, and so on - improved the most. And those improvements were still apparent up to two or more years later."

- Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis & Annie McKee, *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence*

"In the nightly choice between reading a good book and watching a sitcom on television, we often choose the latter – although surveys show again and again that the average mood while watching sitcoms on television is mild depression. Habitually choosing the easy pleasures over the gratifications may have untoward consequences."

- Martin Seligman, *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment*

"Contrary to the myth that only a lucky few can ever decipher the mystery of leadership, our research has shown us that leadership is an observable, learnable set of practices."

Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*

Improvement Points Subscribers' Top Picks for November

"Successful team or organization leadership begins with successful self-leadership. The first step in improving your team or organization is improving yourself."

- from *Ringin' True to You*

www.clemmer.net/excerpts/ringing_true.shtml

"Customer service, especially service that delights and astounds, is voluntary. Employees decide whether to follow strict company policy or make a little exception for a customer's unique circumstances. They can decide whether to call customers by name, or treat them as more files to be managed, more calls to be handled, more mouths to be fed."

- from *The View from the Front Line*

www.clemmer.net/excerpts/front_lines.shtml

"Effective cultural change has at its core a simple, basic definition of the beliefs that are to shape the organization's character. Then comes the hardest leadership test of all; consistently showing rather than just telling what the organization stands for."

- from *Bridging the Rhetoric-Reality Values Gap*

www.clemmer.net/excerpts/whatwe_get.shtml



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Page 6 of 6

Could Your Organization Be More Customer-Focused?

If you have been striving to improve customer service levels in your organization, but not quite pulling it together, you may want to attend my two-day **Leading a Customer-Centered Organization** workshop in Calgary, Alberta or Vancouver, British Columbia. This intensive session contains 20 years of my research, experiences, best practices, and leadership/personal development. Expect two full days of inspiration and lots of practical applications. You'll leave with plenty of insights, ideas, and plans. And you'll feel personally reenergized and inspired to renew your leadership efforts.

The Vancouver and Calgary seminars are the only public sessions I've scheduled for this workshop -- if you don't live in Alberta or BC, here's your chance to visit these great Canadian cities and boost your leadership performance at the same time!

You can listen to a brief audio message from me about these practical workshops by clicking [here](http://PlayAudioMessage.com/play.asp?m=32925&f=OQJXMT&ps=13&p=1):
<http://PlayAudioMessage.com/play.asp?m=32925&f=OQJXMT&ps=13&p=1>.

Full details on the workshop are available [here](http://www.clemmer.net/events/dcco/dcco.shtml): www.clemmer.net/events/dcco/dcco.shtml.

Give the Gift of Leadership

We're offering deep discounts on packages of my books, audio tapes, and CD during the month of December. For less than the cost of a turkey, you can give Clients, colleagues and family a gift that will feed their minds and hearts for the rest of their lives! Details are [here](http://www.clemmer.net/books/special.shtml): www.clemmer.net/books/special.shtml



I would appreciate your feedback on this newsletter, and any issues or topics you'd like me to address in future issues. I also 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!

Best wishes for a happy holiday season, and a healthy and leaderful New Year!

All the best,

Jim

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