

**Practical Leadership:***Inspiring Action, Achieving Results***Jim Clemmer's Leader Letter**

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**A New Direction for the *Leader Letter***

As longtime subscribers to the *Leader Letter* already know, one of the themes I come back to again and again is change. Change in the workplace. Change in the home. Change in our lives.

Well this month, my big theme is change in the *Leader Letter*!

Nothing too drastic. You'll still receive a monthly missive to your inbox. The big change is now you don't have to wait for it.

As I said last month, I have a new [blog on practical leadership](#). I love the interactive format, and how it allows me to not only post my thoughts, but also encourages you to contribute yours. So starting this month I'll begin posting the regular features from the *Leader Letter* on my [blog](#).

All you have to do is simply click on either of the following images in Firefox or the new Internet Explorer (version 7) and a button with *Practical Leadership* should appear at the top of your browser window.



You can then track updates without adding another site to your daily "must-visit" list. Just click on your browser tab each morning to get a daily dose of inspiration from articles, thoughts, and *Leader Letter* items as soon as they're posted. It's a quick shot of inspiration or learning a few times per week rather than one large newsletter every month. Think of it as a little something to get you going as your inbox updates.

The *Leader Letter* is now a summary of the "best-of" or the most popular items from the previous month's [blog](#) postings.

If you prefer to keep reading each month's *Leader Letter* in one place, we will continue to deliver the newsletter (selected blog entries as shown below) in our traditional format online. You can view or print-out the full May newsletter on our site [here](#).



**JIM CLEMMER**

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#### **Now That's Refreshing! Newsletter Feedback Rejuvenates and Re-energizes**

I invest about a day per month in writing my monthly *Leader Letter*. Our support staff then spend about the same amount of time fixing my mistakes, cleaning up after me, and "prettifying it up." I do get fairly frequent e-mails and comments from people I meet at various speaking engagements and workshops about how useful they find the *Leader Letter*. But that is infrequent and purely anecdotal.

Last month was the *Leader Letter's* fourth anniversary. It was a perfect time to get broader and more systemic input on the newsletter. So we ran a reader survey. Within a few weeks, 110 readers answered the survey's seven questions. Over thirty of them offered write-in suggestions for additional features they'd like to see added. And over sixty-five people (more than half) added overall comments on the *Leader Letter* and/or my work.

This feedback was extremely helpful and very heartening. Nearly 60% of readers rated the *Leader Letter* the highest possible on the usefulness scale. And 84% rated it eight or higher on a 10-point scale of overall quality. I was a bit surprised to see 81% of readers felt the *Leader Letter* was "just the right length." In today's world of overflowing e-mail inboxes and extreme time pressures, I expected readers to ask for a shorter publication. I also found the rankings of the *Leader Letter's* typical sections very helpful. The highest ranking went to a section I was thinking of dropping ("Thoughts That Make You Go Hmm...")!

The write-in suggestions provided very interesting ideas that I need to chew on some more. I am especially heartened and intrigued by reader interest in – and ideas for – the business fable (Moose-on-the-Table) on courageous conversations in the workplace that I am currently writing.

The most rewarding of all were the many positive and supportive comments added to the final "Overall comments" section. It is quite rewarding to hear of the many ways readers use and benefit from the *Leader Letter*.

You can review all the survey results and written comments at <http://www.surveymonkey.com/Report.asp?U=352986927991>.

We've also extended our offer to have readers complete the survey and enter a chance to win one of twenty-five copies of my new book *Moose-on-the-Table: A Fable of Courageous Conversations in the Workplace* (not necessarily the final title) when it comes out later this year. Your chances of winning are currently one in four! If you haven't completed it already, go to <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=955363529869> and participate in the survey.

Thanks very much!

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**Verbal Communications and Meeting Effectiveness**

Within a few minutes of my article excerpt below going out through our [Improvement Points service](#), I received Larry Beckon's e-mail.

April 18 – Improvement Point

**"There are many ways we can continually improve our verbal communication skills. These might include joining Toastmasters, taking a public speaking course, getting personal video based speaking feedback, personal coaching, participating in interpersonal skill training, getting training on facilitating meetings, taking a sales course, giving speeches at service clubs, and the like. Strong leaders, on the grow, do whatever they can to continually improve their ability to speak to groups and persuade others to follow their lead."**

- from Jim Clemmer's article, "Inspiring and Energizing with Strong Verbal Communications"

[Read the full article now!](#)

[http://www.clemmer.net/articles/article\\_85.aspx](http://www.clemmer.net/articles/article_85.aspx)

*"As usual, what you have written about verbal communications is useful. You might want to create or issue an article (knowing you, you may have already created such an article) about asking questions and listening. I have found that the most useful means of communicating are asking questions and listening. Doing that leads to increased understanding by all involved and also leads to bringing person together."*

*"It is amazing to me that many persons at meetings seem to wait for "their turn" to say something that they believe will convince others that their way is "the right way", rather than listening and learning so that all might together create a right way that is better than what any one person might create by themselves."*

**Larry Beckon**  
**Michigan Department of Transportation**

Larry, thanks for your feedback, suggestions, and observation. You're very right; questioning and listening is a powerful leadership skill. In our workshops, we teach some of this as "Ask Assertive" versus the much more common "Tell Assertive" most managers are used to using. It's a very key element in the coaching skills development work we do.

I'd love to write something on this. However, I am finishing up my first business fable. The working title is [Moose-on-the-Table: A Fable on Courageous Conversations in the Workplace](#). This new project – and exciting new writing approach for me – is really filling up what little creative time I have available these days.

Jim

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Larry raised some excellent points and when he responded to my note he even provided a great example of common problems with team or meeting processes.

*"I was at a meeting the other day, where a recommendation was made early in the meeting by Dave and then persons talked about the recommendation. As the meeting proceeded, I noticed (after about 40-50 minutes had passed) that there were several persons who made comments and then made additional comments several other times during the meeting - comments that were very similar to their original comments. I noticed that some others in the room (there were about 12-15 persons in the room) said nothing.*

*I said something like 'I wonder if some persons who have not yet talked about this matter have questions or comments they would like to share. This might be a good time to share your thoughts.' One person (I will call him Henry) commented in some detail. Another person also commented (with comments similar to Henry's comments, but from a different viewpoint) and then a third (with comments that were different than what anyone else had said).*

*Later in the meeting a vote was taken. The recommendation was not approved. A few days later I was in another meeting with Dave who made the original recommendation. He was explaining to the persons in that meeting (they had not been in the earlier meeting) what had happened. He indicated that he thought the comments made by Henry were the reason why the vote turned out the way it did. This is an example of listening, asking questions, and getting new thoughts on the table that impacted the decision that was made."*

Larry

**Attention Deficit Disorder is Becoming a Major Management/Organizational Crisis**

Recently an [\*Improvement Points\*](#) subscriber sent me this e-mail:

*"A colleague recently forwarded one of your 'Improvement Points' newsletters to me (Stop Working and Start Living) and it was right on the money for what I needed to hear that day. Today I am an employee that has been recently moved to a leadership role (overseeing/ coordinating a team of 5 people). I was diagnosed with ADD when I was in school -- during my education I was medicated but have been working successfully unmedicated for 5 years. Since I have moved into my new role I have seen my ADD return -- while it may be a response to the overwhelming change in roles or equally the lack of support I am receiving in this position -- I am wondering if you have any suggestions/advice to help guide a person with ADD."*

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I am glad to hear that this [\*Improvement Point\*](#) was so useful to her. What she is describing is an issue I now raise in most of my management workshops. ADD is becoming a major problem for managers and entire management teams. Unfortunately, I am not surprised to hear that she's experiencing an ADD relapse. I have written fairly extensively about this problem within management teams. There's a summary of some of my work in this area in the June 2005 issue of the [\*Leader Letter\*](http://www.clemmer.net/news/june2005.html) at <http://www.clemmer.net/news/june2005.html>.

In the "Thoughts That Make You Go Hmmm...." section of this issue I quote the work of Dr. Edward Hallowell from his January 2005 *Harvard Business Review* article "Overloaded Circuits: Why Smart People Underperform." Here's the Executive Summary of this article from HBR's web site:

"Frenzied executives who fidget through meetings, lose track of their appointments, and jab at the "door close" button on the elevator aren't crazy -- just crazed. They suffer from a newly recognized neurological phenomenon that the author, a psychiatrist, calls attention deficit trait, or ADT. It isn't an illness; it's purely a response to the hyperkinetic environment in which we live. But it has become epidemic in today's organizations. When a manager is desperately trying to deal with more input than he possibly can, the brain and body get locked into a reverberating circuit while the brain's frontal lobes lose their sophistication, as if vinegar were added to wine. The result is black-and-white thinking; perspective and shades of gray disappear. People with ADT have difficulty staying organized, setting priorities, and managing time, and they feel a constant low level of panic and guilt. It is possible to control ADT by engineering one's environment and one's emotional and physical health. Make time every few hours for a "human moment"--a face-to-face exchange with a person you like. Get enough sleep, switch to a good diet, and get adequate exercise. Break down large tasks into smaller ones, and keep a section of your work space clear. Try keeping a portion of your day free of appointments and e-mail. The author recommends that companies invest in amenities that contribute to a positive atmosphere." Ned Hallowell, MD is a psychiatrist and the founder of the Hallowell Center for Cognitive and Emotional Health in Sudbury, Massachusetts. He began his career treating ADD in kids. He's the author of 12 books. Some deal with ADD in kids. But his most recent work is looking at what he sees as a crisis among managers today.

I just finished reading his book *CrazyBusy: Overstretched, Overbooked, and About to Snap. Strategies for Coping in World Gone ADD*.

I recommend she get a copy of his book. What are your experiences with battling this growing ADD problem within your life, workplace, or management role?

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**My Top Ten Articles**

The single biggest driver of traffic to our web site (by a long shot) is my collection of 260 indexed [book excerpts, columns, and articles](#). I've made them freely available for you to read, [reprint](#), and pass along to others. And now you can even track which articles are most popular with my readers. The next time you go to the [articles page](#), you'll see a Top Ten list. It updates dynamically, so you will always know what the hot topic is.

**Soft Skills Becoming More Important In Highly Technical Environments**

An editor for a major Information Technology (IT) publishing firm contacted me for an interview on how the Chief Information Officer (CIO) and IT staff have a tendency to focus narrowly on technology and down play teamwork, communication, and "people issues." But, as she rightly pointed out, "soft skills are becoming increasingly important as IT staff steps out of the shadow of a service function and more as a business-transforming unit."

I have worked with a number of IT departments and technology companies. Many professionals in that field certainly do need stronger leadership or soft skills.

As background to our hour long interview I sent her these links:

[September 2004 issue of the Leader Letter](#) features a huge and growing problem with the misuse of e-mail and the immense confusion between information and communication.

"[Leadership Lessons for the Emotional Intelligence Research](#)" provides arguments of the head (hard) to get at issues of the heart (soft).

A selection of articles on [balancing management](#) (hard) and leadership (soft) as well as a few on adding technology to the mix.

A selection of articles on [Mobilizing and Energizing](#).

What's been your experience with this issue as either someone in the IT field, managing IT people, or being served by IT professionals?

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**Why So Many Organizational Change Programs Fail**

One organizational problem that keeps repeating itself is the high failure rate for implementing new organizational improvement efforts like increasing customer service levels, re-structuring, mergers/acquisitions, introducing new technologies, performance management systems, leadership training, and the like. I recently wrote an article on this recurring problem for a new column I am writing for *HR Professional* magazine. Here's a link to a version of the article aimed at managers. It features a chart at the heart of the problem; [bolt-on programs versus built-in culture change](#).

**Thoughts That Make You Go HmMMM...on Meeting Effectiveness**

***"In the last few decades much research has proven the superiority of group decision making over that of even the brightest individual in the group. There is one exception to this rule. If the group lacks harmony or the ability to cooperate, decision-making quality and speed suffer. Research at Cambridge University found that even groups comprising brilliant individuals will make bad decisions if the group disintegrates into bickering, interpersonal rivalry, or power plays... A leader skilled in collaboration can keep resonance high and thus ensure that the group's decisions will be worth the effort of meeting."***

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

***"The leader who understands how process unfolds uses as little force as possible and runs the group without pressuring people. When force is used, conflict and argument follow. The group field degenerates. The climate is hostile, neither open nor nourishing. The wise leader runs the group without fighting to have things a certain way. The leader's touch is light. The leader neither defends nor attacks. Remember that consciousness, not selfishness, is both the means of teaching and the teaching itself. Group members will challenge the ego of one who leads egocentrically. But one who leads selflessly and harmoniously will grow and endure."***

- John Heider, *The Tao of Leadership: Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching Adapted for a New Age*

***"I have noticed that the people who are late are often so much jollier than the people who have to wait for them."***

- E.V. Lucas, British author

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***“The Ken Blanchard Companies recently conducted a survey of more than 900 corporate executives. Results show that while employees perceive that their job success depends increasingly on their effectiveness as team members and team leaders, very few have actually received training on how to create, lead, or participate in teams. In fact, many of them feel that the time spent on teams is not necessarily productive or effective. Ineffective use of meeting time was cited as the highest frustration about being part of a team; followed by ineffective communication among team members (50%); and lack of accountability (47%). Other common complaints include: lack of process for structuring a team and its work; lack of clear purpose; and lack of trust among team members.”***

[www.hr.com](http://www.hr.com), August 14, 2006

***“In her study of group work in school classrooms, the late Stanford sociologist Elizabeth Cohen found that if kids are simply put into teams and told to solve a problem, the typical result is one kid dominating and others looking totally disengaged.***

***But if teachers take the time to establish norms - roles, goals, etc. – ‘not only will [the children] behave according to the new norms, but they will enforce rules on other group members.’”***

- Jerry Useem, “What’s that spell? TEAMWORK!” *Fortune*

**What I am Reading**

Our local daily newspaper runs a feature in their book section each Saturday asking local personalities and community leaders what they’re reading. Here’s what ran in *The Record* on the same day as the world famous Elmira Maple Syrup Festival (the little town of Elmira, ON swells in size by ten times for this event each year)!

**WHAT THEY’RE READING  
(Mar 31, 2007)**

Jim Clemmer of Kitchener heads The Clemmer Group, which offers management leadership training. He is currently reading:

***BUILT TO CHANGE: HOW TO ACHIEVE ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS***  
by Edward Lawler III and Christopher Worley (Wiley, 352 pages, \$38.99 hardcover)

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"Both authors research and teach at the University of Southern California's Centre for Effective Organizations. This excellent book pulls together best practices and research on how highly effective organizations stay that way by fostering continuous change. It's not enough to "manage change" (which I believe is an oxymoron). Strong leaders build organizational cultures of continuous improvement, growth, and development.

I am always looking for material like this to further illustrate and reinforce my practical leadership keynote presentations, workshops, and ongoing consulting work with organizations here in North America and abroad.

My favourite lounging around the house sweatshirt reads 'So many books and so little time.' That expresses my feelings about both reading all the books I'd like to read and writing all the books I still want to write.

I am currently writing my sixth book. With a working title of *Moose-on-the-Table: Courageous Conversations in the Workplace*, this is my first 'business fable' using a fictional story to address the widespread problem of people avoiding or dancing around important workplace issues that everyone knows exist, but no one is talking about."

**Changing Me to Change Them and Other Lessons Learned**

Each year I run a public *Leading @ the Speed of Change* workshop here in my hometown of Kitchener, Ontario (just forty-five minutes from the Toronto airport). Since my keynotes and workshops are always private sessions tailored specifically to the organization or association I'm working for, this is one of the few opportunities most people ever get to work with me at a public event.

Each year's session is different as I incorporate new learnings and introduce various materials. This year I'm adding additional videos, exercises, examples, research, and applications to the mix. I am excited about the revitalized material that's emerged from so much of this year's client work. I look forward to sharing it with a diverse audience joining us from across Canada, the U.S., and New Zealand (he'll get the prize for furthest trip).

One of the unique things about this particular version of my most popular workshop and keynote topic area is that I blend topics such as personal or self-leadership with leading others. In past sessions, this has been a key learning for many participants. We can't lead others to a place we haven't been – or aren't headed toward. I especially recall one manager last year who attended the session to "learn how to change the people in his organization." During the two days, he realized that changing them starts with changing me.

There are still a few seats left. For more information to go <http://www.clemmer.net/events/lsc.aspx>. There are special discounts for bringing colleagues along so you can learn and apply these principles together.

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**Favorite April Improvement Points**

Improvement Points is a free service providing a key thought or quotation from one of my articles, provided three times per week, directly to your e-mail inbox. Each complimentary Improvement Point links directly into the full article on our web site that spawned it. If you'd like to read more about that day's Improvement Point, you can choose to click through to the short article for a quick five-minute read. This is your opportunity for a short pause that refreshes, is an inspirational vitamin, or a quick performance boost. You can circulate especially relevant or timely articles or Improvement Points to your team, Clients, or colleagues for further discussion or action.

Here are my personal three choices of the Improvement Points we sent out in April:

**"Energizing leaders employ a multitude of creative ways to foster appreciation and recognition, giving among all team and organization members. They also find numerous ways to hike energy and enjoyment levels by marking and celebrating milestones along the way."**

- from Jim Clemmer's article, "Celebration is the Pause that Refreshes"
  - [Read the full article now!](#)
  - [http://www.clemmer.net/articles/article\\_164.aspx](http://www.clemmer.net/articles/article_164.aspx)

**"The team management choices can be plotted on a three-point continuum:**

- **Management commands and controls the work group, with some consultation and involvement (this is not a team).**
  - **Management roles and responsibilities (such as scheduling, planning, meeting facilitation, and establishing measures) are shared between team members and the team leader.**
  - **The team is autonomous and manages itself."**
- from Jim Clemmer's article, "Matching Team Types and Focus"
    - [Read the full article now!](#)
    - [http://www.clemmer.net/articles/article\\_270.aspx](http://www.clemmer.net/articles/article_270.aspx)

**"We all make occasional trips to "Pity City" or have our "doubt days." But highly effective people — leaders — have a passion for life and deep commitment to their work or cause (often the same thing)."**

- from Jim Clemmer's article, "Beyond "Near-Life Experiences""
  - [Read the full article now!](#)
  - [http://www.clemmer.net/articles/article\\_342.aspx](http://www.clemmer.net/articles/article_342.aspx)



**JIM CLEMMER**

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#### **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).

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

Jim

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