



**JIM CLEMMER**

Practical Leadership:  
*From Inspiration to Application*

*Jim Clemmer's Leader Letter*

May 2008, Issue 62

### In this issue...

- When Silence Isn't Golden
- When Personal Candor Doesn't Fit the Culture
- Yet Another Kitchener/Cambridge Overflow Session on June 18, 2008
- Customized "Breaking Through the Bull" In-house Workshops
- Blog Alerts
- Untying the Complex Communication Knot
- Media Interviews Now Available Online
- More Reviews for *Moose on the Table*
- So You Think You're a Good Listener
- Thoughts That Make You Go Hmmm...
- Most Popular Improvement Points
- Feedback and Follow-up

As you read this I'm winding up my cross-Canada [Breaking Through the Bull](#) workshop tour. With over 800 participants in eight cities (stretching from the Pacific to the Atlantic oceans) as well as radio, TV, and print interviews, the last month has been a blur of moose!

On the surface this issue of *The Leader Letter* centers around [Moose on the Table](#) and hunting the issues (moose) in our workplaces. But that's just on the surface. I was struck – once again – with the realization that the deeper issues are really about organizational culture, leading myself, and leading others. And the moose metaphor continues to be a playful – and highly effective – way to bring these deeper issues to the surface.

So if you're a regular *Leader Letter* reader who's been following the moose tracks throughout the last six issues, and if you've read about Pete Leonard's adventures in [Moose on the Table](#), search below the surface of this issue's moose articles and stories for the deeper organizational, cultural, and leadership lessons.

And dare to stare deeply into your mirror of self-reflection.

### When Silence Isn't Golden

*The Globe & Mail* is Canada's national newspaper with the largest business/professional audience in the country. I've been writing occasional pieces for *The Globe & Mail* since 1992. Last month my latest article appeared on the massive problem of silence and lack of candor found in way too many organizations.

Entitled "When Silence Isn't Golden" this article outlines the problem, offers steps for addressing lack of candor, and provides an expanded and revised quick quiz to see if your organization silently suffers from lack of candor. [Click here to read it.](#)



May 2008, Issue 62

## When Personal Candor Doesn't Fit the Culture

Right after my article "[When Silence Isn't Golden](#)" appeared in *The Globe & Mail*, I received this e-mail from a reader:

*"Hello Jim,*

*I just wanted to send you a note to let you know how much your article today resonated with me ... you hit it bang-on and helped me resolve something in my professional life. After a very successful nine years leading a large marketing division in a very large organization, a new vice president came in and within three months showed me the door. I have struggled to come up with a solid and simple reason for why this happened. But I finally realized what really happened when I read your article.*

*When I was hired, there was a 'no moose on the table' culture -- over the past number of years, with a revamp of the organization's leadership structure (starting with the president and the vice presidents) there had been a huge cultural shift. No longer was candor valued or welcomed. Everyone clammed up talking about the tough issues in fear of their jobs and what might happen to them -- the moose was there, everyone knew, but no one did anything about it. Outside of 'official meetings' where people all agreed with the boss, people openly expressed their confusion and frustrations about not being heard and not agreeing with where we were headed. The pendulum had shifted and there was a lack of candor.*

*As this shift happened, I realize that I did not adapt well to it and I could not change the direction of this Titanic organization alone. I continued to be myself, provide candor and ask tough questions. But this was no longer the organization's culture. So I was no longer a fit. Exemplary performance in the past didn't matter. Stifling opinions and agreeing with all the top bosses was the only way to survive.*

*Reading your article, I was reminded of Jack Welch's (retired GE CEO) emphasis on candor as well. As I'm sure you've read in his books, this is something that he lives by and values almost above all else in any organization.*

*I can't tell you how satisfying it is to finally realize this and how it will help in my search for new opportunities.*

*Thank you."*

Joel



May 2008, Issue 62

What are your experiences dealing with bosses, senior executives, or a culture that shuts down frank conversation and kills candor? How have you dealt with this problem? I'd love to get your thoughts and experiences at [Jim.Clemmer@Clemmer.net](mailto:Jim.Clemmer@Clemmer.net).

**Yet Another Kitchener/Cambridge Overflow**

**Session on June 18, 2008**

We kicked off our national [Breaking Through the Bull](#) workshop tour right here in my home town on April 3. That session quickly filled up so we added another one on May 29. Within a few weeks it was full too. So we've added a third one on June 18. That will be it for open or public versions of this workshop. 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 at an incredibly low cost. The Cambridge Holiday Inn is only forty 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!

Go to [www.breakingthroughthebull.com](http://www.breakingthroughthebull.com) for more information and registration.

**Customized "Breaking Through the Bull" In-house Workshops**

One side of our core business is the customized keynotes, workshops, and retreats I deliver. The other side of The CLEMMER Group services is ongoing consulting around culture change and improving organizational performance and designing highly customized training programs. These often involve training trainers for internal delivery to their own organization. For more on this part of our business go to <http://www.clemmer.net/consulting>.

Now that I've finished the public [Breaking Through the Bull](#) workshops, we're ready to customize internal versions of this powerful session. Half, one, and two-day versions of this workshop are designed to:

- Create a More Balanced Organization
- Develop a High-Performance Culture
- Build Trust and Teamwork
- Boost Leadership Development
- Improve Change Leadership
- Strengthen Communication Strategies
- Bolster Upward Leadership
- Set Clearer Priorities and Follow Through
- Enhance Motivation and Engagement

You can find reviews of my "Breaking Through the Bull" and *Moose on the Table* workshops at: <http://www.breakingthroughthebull.com/testimonials.html>.



May 2008, Issue 62

Download our new customized in-house [Breaking Through the Bull brochure](#) here or contact me or Heather to discuss this further. Our contact information is at <http://www.clemmer.net/contact>.

## Blog Alerts

We've recently started offering new subscribers to *The Leader Letter* a chance to also receive an e-mail whenever I update my blog. Since January our blog subscriptions have shot through the roof with a ten-fold increase in folks getting an e-mail whenever I post something new.

[Subscribe to Practical Leadership by e-mail.](#)

## Untying the Complex Communication Knot

The following is a print interview I did with a newspaper editor in April:

**What prompted you to undertake a book focused on the communication theme? Had you noticed miscommunication, lack of communication, or communication avoidance through your work as an organizational consultant?**

Yes, it's huge. Many teams and organizations avoid dealing with tough issues and talk in the hallways after the meetings about what they really believe are the issues or problems that need to be addressed. Too many managers have developed a multitude of ways to shut down debate and real conversation. These include branding people as "not being on board" or "not being a team player" for disagreeing with what the managers believe or want. Or the manager might ignore or minimize the people that disagree with him or her and favor those that kiss up to them. If the manager is faced with survey data or feedback that people are unhappy they'll often deny it by saying something like "that's just their perception, that's not reality."

**How widespread are communication issues at work today? Why is it an issue?**

Communication breakdowns are the single biggest complaint or problem we run into in our consulting work and in our workshops. It's an extremely complex issue with both cause and effect tightly intertwined. In many cases, people don't have the skills to address tough issues with each other. And so they do it poorly and raise defensiveness in the other person or stir up conflict that often gets personal and can be quite vicious. Many times people are afraid because they have seen others who don't agree with the boss or team ostracized, moved off the promotion track, ignored, or punished with the worst projects/assignments.

Adding to the noise of communication issues is the technology overload. Lots of people confuse communicating with dumping information such as increasing e-mail volume or adding more PowerPoint slides. This actually reduces meaningful two-way communication because everyone is scrambling just to clear their inboxes or make it through yet another meeting. So they have no time for thoughtful and difficult conversations. Quantity is confused with quality.



May 2008, Issue 62

As if that weren't enough, when the organization's structure is badly designed and the processes or methods for moving information, work flow, products, or customers through the organization are flawed, all kinds of errors, rework, waste, and frustration build up. People will often look at the mess that results and say "we need better communications around here." But in these cases, communication problems are the end result of deeper problems with processes, systems, or organizational structure.

### **Why did you take the fictionalized approach with your new book?**

We've found that using a playful approach such as through the moose metaphor helps create a safer environment for people to address issues (moose). So [\*Moose on the Table: A Novel Approach to Communications @ Work\*](#) uses a fair bit of humor and a whimsical approach to harness the power of the metaphor.

Given that the organizational issues are fairly complex and the personal issues of fear and courage are difficult for many people to recognize or acknowledge in themselves, the adventures of Pete Leonard are designed to give the reader someone they can identify with and learn from as he faces his own fear, his bully boss, and sorts through his team and organization's cause and effect tangles to finally move everyone forward.

### **Media Interviews Now Available Online**

It's a really busy month, as I bring my message of improved communications in the workplace to audiences across Canada.

As part of this tour I'm also doing an extensive media-blitz.

When possible I'm posting audio and video for all to see and hear. Currently you can listen to three radio interviews I recently did [here](#).

I've also updated my media page with the schedule for all the appearances I made around the country.



May 2008, Issue 62

### More Reviews for *Moose on the Table*

The reviews for *Moose on the Table* keep coming in and they are overwhelmingly positive. Here are a couple of the latest additions!

The following is an excerpt from the full review that Laurie Blake just sent me at [http://www.workplace-mag.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=201](http://www.workplace-mag.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=201).

*"...most will recognize the real frustrations and challenges of a corporation, and a life, trying to pull itself back from disaster. I found myself thinking about my actions, or lack thereof, in similar situations from my past and wondering if I, too, could overcome my fear of moose on the table and lead change.*

*Easy and fun to read, Moose on the Table might be just the tale for those about to embark on a quest for change in their own lives or organizations."*

Laurie Blake, Editor  
Workplace magazine

*"What a delightful read and a brilliant way to help people understand the moose that must be dealt with in our lives. It was educational, inspiring, enormously insightful, and, as with all your work, empowering. It will change a lot of lives."*

Maurice O'Callaghan, Author and Professional Speaker

You can read all the reviews at <http://www.moosonthetable.com/reviews.aspx>.

### So You Think You're a Good Listener

Patrick Barwise and Seán Meehan have a very good, short piece in the April 2008 issue of *Harvard Business Review*. Here's a brief excerpt:

**Boss** : *Why is Janet leaving?*  
**Colleague** : *She's been unhappy for months.*  
**Boss** : *Why didn't she tell me?*  
**Colleague** : *She tried.*

*Conversations like that are all too common. Why is it that bosses often seem unable to hear tough messages? A key reason, we found, is that managers have skewed perceptions about their openness to challenging news.*



May 2008, Issue 62

*Our research -- based on Personnel Decisions International's surveys of over 4,000 U.S. managers across various industries and functions revealed the gap between managers' self-evaluations and colleagues' assessments is widest when it comes to gauging receptiveness to hearing about difficult issues.*

*...in most boss-subordinate relationships, superiors overestimate their openness to receiving difficult messages and simultaneously underestimate the extent to which the power difference discourages subordinates from speaking their minds. Put simply, managers often unwittingly signal that they don't want to hear bad news -- for instance, by changing the subject or avoiding interaction -- and subordinates tend to censor themselves."*

#### Thoughts That Make You Go Hmmm...on Listening

*"Know how to listen, and you will profit even from those who talk badly."*  
- Plutarch, Greek moralist and biographer

*"Some people would rather be wrong than quiet."*  
- Unknown

*"Unfortunately the term communication has drifted from its original meaning, based on the same root as communion, which denotes an intense, two-way sharing or exchange - a coming together of thoughts and ideas. Real communication has to do with careful listening, observation, and dialogue, and it is founded on the truth."*  
- Frederick F. Reichheld, *Loyalty Rules! How Today's Leaders Build Lasting Relationships*

*"A wise old owl sat in an oak,  
The more he heard the less he spoke;  
The less he spoke the more he heard.  
Why aren't we all like that wise old bird?"*  
- Edward Hershey Richards, British poet

*"Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen."*  
- Winston Churchill

*"In my experience, one of the most common challenges that successful people face is a constant need to win. When the issue is important, they want to win. When the issue is trivial, they want to win. Even when the issue isn't worth the effort or is clearly to their disadvantage, they still want to win.*



May 2008, Issue 62

*Research shows that the more we achieve, the more we tend to want to 'be right.' At work meetings, we want our position to prevail. In arguments, we pull out all the stops to come out on top. Even at supermarket checkouts, we scout other lines to see if there's one that's moving faster."*

- Marshall Goldsmith, executive coach (Forbes Top Five), speaker and author

### Most Popular 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 the three most popular Improvement Points we sent out in April:

**"Effective teams meet frequently. At the senior management level, we've found a correlation between how frequently (and effectively) a team meets and the amount of vertical management, departmentalism, territoriality, turfdom, etc. in that team."**

- from Jim Clemmer's article, "Pathways and Pitfalls to Leading Teams"

[Read the full article now!](#)

[http://www.clemmer.net/articles/article\\_272.aspx](http://www.clemmer.net/articles/article_272.aspx)

**"It's inspiring to be with those optimists in their 60s, 70s, 80s or even 90s who are excited about some new venture or interest. Too many people let their disappointments and cynicism slowly extinguish their life spark. When they reach their senior years they are bitter and jaded."**

- from Jim Clemmer's article, "Apathy and Cynicism Zap Our Spirit"

[Read the full article now!](#)

[http://www.clemmer.net/articles/article\\_49.aspx](http://www.clemmer.net/articles/article_49.aspx)



May 2008, Issue 62

"Share all core strategic measurements (including "confidential" financial and operating data) with everyone in your organization. Treat people like full-fledged business partners and they'll act that way. But don't snow them under with a blizzard of meaningless reports and numbers. Train everyone how to read these data. Show them how to relate the measurements to their daily operations and improvement activities."  
- from Jim Clemmer's article, "Education and Communications Pathways and Pitfalls"  
[Read the full article now!](#)  
[http://www.clemmer.net/articles/article\\_187.aspx](http://www.clemmer.net/articles/article_187.aspx)

#### 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).

---

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://www.clemmer.net/newsletter/leader\\_signup.aspx](http://www.clemmer.net/newsletter/leader_signup.aspx)

Copyright 2008, Jim Clemmer, The CLEMMER Group