

THE LEADER LETTER

Leading with *STRENGTH*

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MARCH 2013, ISSUE 120

Are your houseplants stunted? Are you limiting their growth by keeping them in a small pot?

BBC Nature reports a fascinating story entitled, "*Stunted*" *Pot Plants Cannot Reach Their Full Potential*" from the Society for Experimental Biology's annual meeting in Salzburg, Austria. Researcher Hendrik Poorter with the Julich Research Centre in Germany found that houseplants "sense the size of the pot" and grow accordingly. As soon as he saw the results of this study he immediately repotted all his plants. *"I thought, you poor guys, what have I done to you?"*



Poorter and his researchers used MRI scans to see root development and correlated that with plant growth. They found that a plant's roots quickly stretched out when first planted or repotted. But **"when they reach the edge, they sent some kind of signal to the shoots to say, 'there's a problem -- stop growing.'"** Their experiments on 80 different species showed that doubling a pot's size caused the plant to grow 50% larger. **"The surprising thing is that there seemed to be no end to the pot limitation,"** Poorter reported.

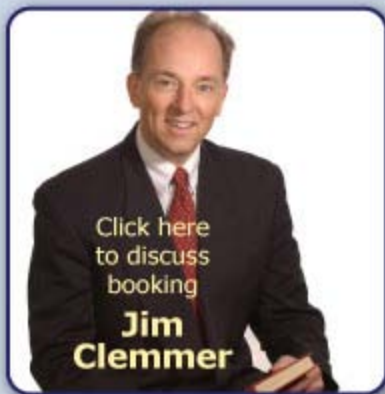
The same thing happens in leadership and coaching. People respond to the size of their **perceived** boundaries -- real or imagined. Extraordinary coaches help "coachees" endlessly repot themselves and keep growing.

Visit Jim's Site!
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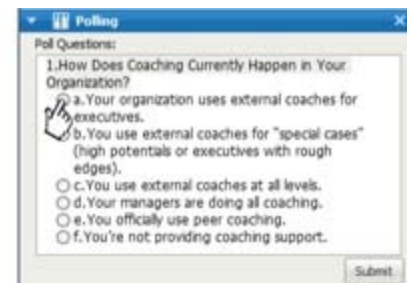


This issue publishes all my February [blog posts](#). Many of these grew out of the audience surveys and questions from our [Building Extraordinary Coaching Skills](#) webcast. This issue also includes my blogs on growing our next generation of leaders, Valentine's Day reflections on love, leadership, and productivity, and a quiz on doubling learner motivation with strengths-based leadership that you can complete to enter a draw for a copy of *How to Be Exceptional: Drive Leadership Success by Magnifying Your Strengths*.

Gotta run! My poor houseplants need a few coaching sessions to grow their boundaries.

COACHING SURVEY: HUGE IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Last month I delivered a one hour webcast on **6 Steps to Building a Coaching Culture with Exceptional Leaders**. Participants from 41 countries registered to attend. At broadcast time 536 unique sites signed on -- many were teams or groups viewing the webcast together.

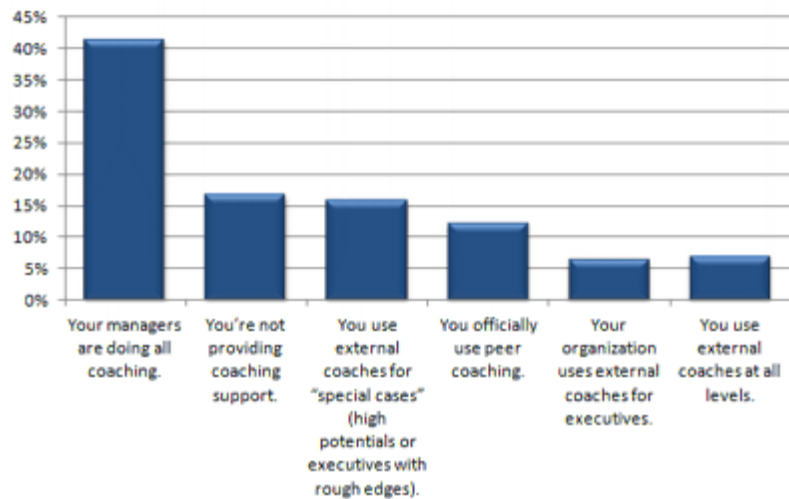


The best feedback on whether participants feel they are getting high value is how long they stay tuned in. Busy development professionals and leaders vote with their feet and leave -- especially a session that they didn't pay for (it was complimentary) -- if it's not worth investing precious time. We were delighted that 95% stayed right until the end! Given all the time and resources we invested in designing and delivering this presentation, that was gratifying and very affirming feedback.

During and immediately following the webcast we asked a series of six survey questions. We were pleasantly surprised by an over 80% completion rate. The responses showed lots of room for improvement -- which is likely why many participants joined the webcast in the first place.

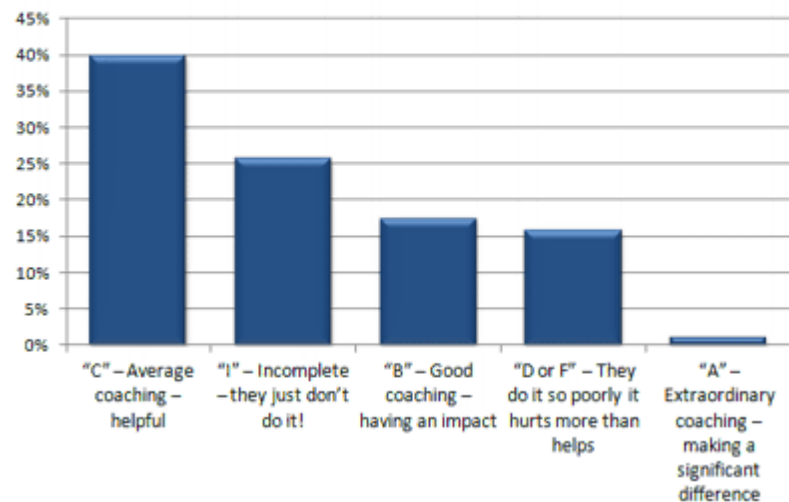
This blog post reports on the first three survey responses. My next post will show the results of the other three questions.

How does coaching currently happen in your organization?



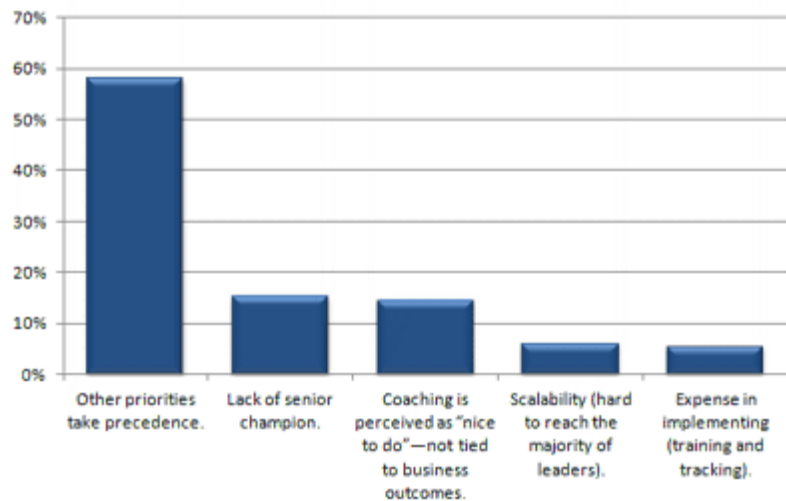
Most organizations rely on managers to provide coaching. But as we see in the next question, they're not doing a very good job. A minuscule number of managers are extraordinary coaches making a significant difference. Over 40% of managers don't coach at all or do such a poor job it hurts more than helps! Another 40% get just a C or average.

What grade would you give your managers on the coaching they currently provide?



The biggest reason for lack of coaching shows that this vital leadership activity is crowded out by other priorities. In the webcast I discussed what we've found gets in the way of coaching. Lack of time is most often cited. That's essentially the same as the priority barrier we see here.

What are the biggest reasons for lack of coaching in your organization?



As I went on to discuss in the webcast, lack of time is an excuse. We've found there are really four underlying "Real Reasons" managers aren't providing more coaching. I'll discuss that a bit further in the next item below.

You can view the webcast recording on demand at [Building Extraordinary Coaching Skills](#). I'll be discussing coaching and our foundational strengths-based leadership development system at our complimentary [Developing Exceptional Leaders and Coaches](#) executive briefing on March 19 in Toronto. We're also providing [Extraordinary Leader](#) and [Extraordinary Coach](#) public workshops in May in Calgary and Toronto.

COACHING SURVEY: BIG NEED FOR SKILL, FEEDBACK, AND MEASUREMENT

The previous item above gave the results of three survey questions from my February webcast *Building Extraordinary Coaching Skills* webcast where I outlined **6 Steps to Building a Coaching Culture with Exceptional Leaders**. The responses show a major coaching shortfall. A tiny fraction of managers were rated as extraordinary coaches. The remaining survey responses shown here explain this coaching gap.

Two of the four "Real Reasons" that get in the way of good coaching discussed in the webcast are "insecure about the true value of one's own coaching" and "misunderstanding the true nature of good coaching." The response below clearly shows a big part of the problem: more than 55% of managers are not getting any coaching skill training at all! And another 20% only give skills to select managers. If a manager isn't being given coaching skills,

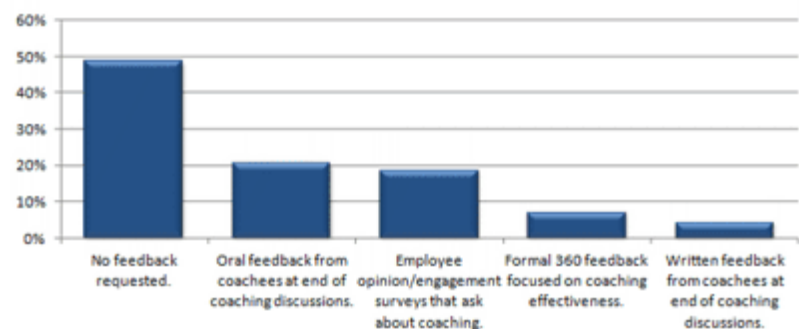
then it's easy to say he or she is "too busy" or overtaken by other priorities to provide coaching.

Where is your organization in providing coaching skills development for line managers?



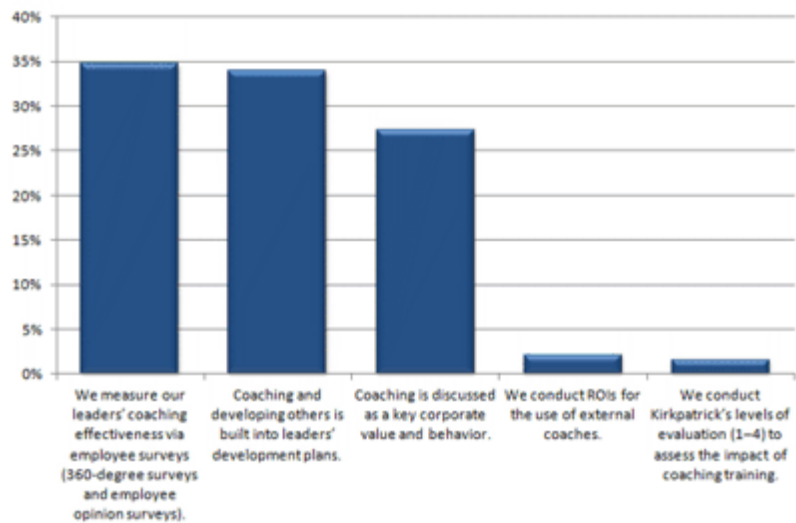
In keeping with the big lack of coaching skill development, nearly 50% of respondents report that coaches -- mostly managers -- don't request any feedback on their coaching effectiveness. In the webcast I cited a large telecom company's study showing that most managers believe they are providing coaching and score themselves high on this vital leadership skill. However, employees state they receive little coaching and score their leaders low. The lack of feedback we see here explains this big coaching gap.

How are you currently asking for feedback on coaching effectiveness?



What gets measured gets managed. Our last survey response shows around 60% of organizations talk about coaching but don't measure it.

How do you currently measure coaching effectiveness and create accountability?



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THE COACH-COACHEE RELATIONSHIP AND THE IMPACT OF EXECUTIVE COACHING

A number of participants in our February [Building Extraordinary Coaching Skills webcast](#) provided comments and raised interesting questions about this vital leadership skill.



One question was whether there's a marked difference in coaching those in volunteer roles versus people in paid positions. In the webcast I outlined our definition of coaching as "**interactions that help the individual being coached to expand awareness, discover superior solutions, and make and implement better decisions.**" Most often we help Clients apply this to performance and career coaching. But it can be broadened to other life issues.

Step #1 of our FUEL model is "Frame the Conversation." Unless the coach has initiated the discussion (such as may come from the coachee's manager), the very first question listed in our Coaching Conversation Guide is for the coach to ask the coachee, "What is the

most important thing for us to focus on?" This sets up an adult to adult discussion that could take place between peers, volunteers, or manager-employee.

Another related question is where to find the **Coaching Topic Checklist** I showed in part during the webcast. This is part of the participant manual in the one or two day [Extraordinary Coach](#) workshop. It's also in [The Extraordinary Coach: How the Best Leaders Help Others Grow](#) book. There are 16 survey items (with room for "Other") on a scale of 1 to 10 to help the coach and coachee decide where to focus their coaching conversation.

An internal coach asked, **"How do I get employees comfortable to receive coaching from me?"** This is a broad question with many possible responses. Any or all four of the seven "Common Coaching Traps" I outlined leads many coaches off track and reduces a coachee's comfort level or perception of value from coaching conversations:

- Not clarifying what the coachee wants from the conversation.
- Too much air time -- coach does more than 25% of the talking.
- Offering advice way too early in the conversation.
- Not exploring multiple alternatives.

Here's another question: **"I am looking into moving toward working with C-Suite Executives on extraordinary skills yielding extraordinary organizations/employees. How does extraordinary coaching impact them?"** This is the core of Zenger Folkman's foundational research on the dramatic differences between the good, the bad, and the extraordinary leaders as in our [Strengths-Based Leadership Development System](#) and our [Extraordinary Leader workshops](#) are built upon:

- 4 - 6 times higher profits
- 6 times higher sales revenues
- 10 - 20 times higher levels of employee engagement
- 3 - 4 times reduction in employees thinking about quitting
- 50% fewer employees that do leave
- Double the satisfaction with pay and job security
- 4 - 5 times more employees "willing to go the extra mile"
- 1.5 times higher customer satisfaction ratings
- Over 3 times safer work environment

This question wasn't answered directly in the webcast: **"I have a problem where I have continually requested to be coached from my supervisor and I cannot get her to do it. How can I change this?"** This could be a mismatch of expectations and the common confusion of the Development Distinction I made between training, mentoring, and coaching.

But the challenge is likely more to do with managing his/her boss. I've written a fair bit about Upward Leadership such as [*"Bad Boss: Learn How to Manage Your Manager"*](#) and other articles listed in the topic area of [Serving, Influencing, and Leading Upward](#).

You can view the webcast recording on demand at [Building Extraordinary Coaching Skills](#). I'll be discussing coaching and our foundational strengths-based leadership development system at our complimentary [Developing Exceptional Leaders and Coaches](#) executive briefing on March 19 in Toronto. We're also providing [Extraordinary Leader and Extraordinary Coach public workshops](#) in May in Calgary and Toronto.

UNTANGLING THE TRAINING, MENTORING, COACHING CONFUSION

Like "vision," "service," or "leadership," coaching has become a word that means different things to different people. Many people think of the typical sports coach who's a veteran of the game (often a retired player). Sports coaches typically develop skills, guide improvements with feedback, and actively direct game plans.



Other people talk about coaching and mentoring in one phrase as if they were two sides of the same coin. And we know of a few organizations where "coaching" means giving corrective feedback. So having your boss say "I'd like to give you some coaching" sends shivers up your spine.

This wide range of meanings is one reason that an organizational survey in a large telecom company showed managers scoring themselves high on providing coaching while their employees scored them low.

This chart shows what we've found improvement distinctions between three key development activities:

Development Distinctions

Training

- Trainer possesses skills or information students lack.
- Primary activity is transmission of information.
- Teacher/student relationship is typically temporary and narrow in focus.

Mentoring

- Senior person conveys wisdom and corporate culture.
- Mentor has traveled the path mentee is seeking.
- Provides connections, references, and advice.

Coaching

- Coach could be superior, subordinate, or peer.
- Coach does not need same background or experiences.
- Enables others to work through and solve their own problems.

We need all three to lead our teams and organizations to peak performance. But if we're going to close the big coaching gap we need a clearer and shared understanding of what exactly good it is.

Unlike sports coaches, highly effective performance, career, or life coaches enable "coachees" to work through and solve their own problems. Jack Zenger succinctly outlines this critical approach in his blog [Develop Subordinates by NOT Answering Their Questions](#). He notes this approach is adult to adult rather than the "teacher-student" or "parent-child" approach found in many of the relationships that leaders have with their team members.

This definition of coaching and the culture it builds is central to my webcast on [Building Extraordinary Coaching Skills](#). I'll be discussing coaching and our foundational strengths-based leadership development system at our complimentary [Developing Exceptional Leaders and Coaches](#) executive briefing on March 19 in Toronto. We're also providing [Extraordinary Leader and Extraordinary Coach public workshops](#) in May in Calgary and Toronto.

MYTHS AND METHODS FOR DEVELOPING OUR NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

In the next 5 -10 years we're going to see waves of leaders retire. Forward thinking organizations are now deep into succession planning as they prepare for this big generational change.



In his *Harvard Business Review* blog, ["We Wait Too Long to Train Our Leaders,"](#) Jack Zenger highlights

Zenger Folkman's research showing that many supervisors get little to no leadership training for nearly a decade! He very rightly pulls the fire alarm on this practice for these three reasons:

- Practice without training ingrains bad habits.
- Practice makes perfect only if done correctly.
- Your young supervisors are practicing on the job whether you've trained them or not.

In his *Forbes* column, "[Should Your Company Be Investing More Heavily in Its Gen Y Execs?](#)" Jack highlights further Zenger Folkman research on this critical issue:

- "One of the stereotypes we have about the youngest generation is that they are more focused on themselves and less focused on company objectives. After analyzing the data on these different groups we learned that the Gen Y group had the highest scores when it came to driving for results.
- Gen Y is sometimes stereotyped as being self-centered. Yet on the leadership competence of Collaboration and Teamwork, they were at the 60th percentile, while the percentile scores were lower for each older generation.
- Probably to no one's surprise, the Gen Y group received the highest scores on Innovation.
- The final surprise was the extremely high scores of the Gen Y group on the dimension of Practicing Self Development. Here they were at the 64th percentile while the Boomers were at the 52nd percentile. This contradicts the image of complacent know-it-alls that is held by some."

We need to start leadership development much earlier. Unlearning bad habits is a lot harder than forming effective skills in the beginning.

Further Reading:

- "[Leading Generation X](#)"
- "[We Need Less Generational Nonsense and More Leadership](#)"
- "[More on Less Generational Nonsense](#)"

LOVE, LEADERSHIP, AND PRODUCTIVITY

Last month we again celebrated Valentine's Day with lots of hearts to convey feelings of love and passion. It's a day to celebrate romantic relationships and express our gratitude and affection for loved ones enriching our lives.

It's also a good time of year to reflect on the powerful impact extraordinary



leaders have on their teams and organizations. Exceptional leaders fan the flames of love and passion for high performance. In his *Forbes* column on "[The Productivity Improvement Steering Wheel: 7 Powerful Steps Every Leader Can Take.](#)" Jack Zenger asks and then answers two critical questions at the heart of inspiring and motivating others to peak performance:

1. What is it that leaders do to create a climate in which people go the extra mile and perform at remarkably high levels? and
2. What causes people to put forth extraordinary discretionary effort?

In a follow up column, Jack continues this critical leadership discussion with "[The 3 Forces That Drive Improvement Productivity.](#)" He gets deeper into "the how" of productivity improvement by sharing research on three powerful forces:

1. The internal motivation and drive of individuals.
2. The performance norms of teams.
3. The organizational dimensions and overall culture of the company.

Leadership researcher, prolific author, and professor Warren Bennis, once concluded, *"a basic ingredient of leadership is passion -- the underlying passion for the promises of life, combined with a very particular passion for a vocation, a profession, a course of action. The leader loves what he or she does and loves doing it."*

There are many leadership pathways to building passion and energy leading to higher productivity. At its core, passionate leadership is an inside job. And that passion starts with building on our strengths.

DOUBLE LEARNER MOTIVATION WITH REVOLUTIONARY STRENGTHS-BASED LEADERSHIP

On March 4, HR.com hosted my complimentary webinar on ***Double Learner Motivation with Strengths-Based Leadership***. In this fast-paced session I discussed why a huge part of the leadership development gap is caused by traditional needs assessments and gap analysis. This weakness-based approach is ineffective and undermines participant motivation for change. I showed pre and post studies examining the impact of leaders choosing to fix weaknesses versus building on existing strengths. 12 to 18 months later, the leaders who magnified their existing strengths showed two - three times more improvement in leadership effectiveness than leaders who worked on fixing their weaknesses.



Following the webinar, participants who are working on their IHR designation were asked to complete the following quiz based on what I covered.

If you've been a regular blog reader since last fall you should have no trouble answering this online [quiz](#). [Complete the quiz online](#) or send us your answers by email and you could win one of two copies of [How to Be Exceptional: Drive Leadership Success by Magnifying Your Strengths](#). We'll draw the two most correct responses from American and Canadian participants and mail you a complimentary copy of the new book.

1. Peter Drucker says:
 - a. Leadership is action, not a position
 - b. Weak leaders have many weaknesses
 - c. Focusing on weaknesses is foolish and irresponsible
 - d. Gap analysis is the root of good strategic planning
2. Zenger Folkman's leadership competency research:
 - a. Was an extensive literature review
 - b. Identified the competencies differentiating the highest and lowest performing leaders
 - c. Showed balanced leaders were the most effective
 - d. Proved leaders need to improve across all leadership competencies
3. The center pole of The Leadership Tent is:
 - a. Leading Change
 - b. Personal Capability
 - c. Interpersonal Skills
 - d. Character
4. The best predictor of employee engagement is:
 - a. The immediate supervisor
 - b. Organizational culture
 - c. Work-life balance
 - d. Onsite daycare, health club, refreshments, and such
5. Extraordinary leaders:
 - a. Are naturally gifted
 - b. Can be Prima Donnas and hard to work with
 - c. Produce measureable results many times higher than average or poor leaders
 - d. Are charismatic
6. Building on leadership strengths:
 - a. Is the only way to become an extraordinary leader
 - b. Broadens the spectrum of development methods
 - c. Contributes to a more positive organizational culture
 - d. All of the above
7. Gap analysis and needs assessment are:
 - a. The clearest way to see what's really going on
 - b. Weakness-based approaches that diminish motivation to change
 - c. The first step in effective training and development programs
 - d. Fun and highly energizing

8. To increase his or her effectiveness from average to extraordinary a leader must:
 - a. Become highly effective at most competencies
 - b. Eliminate weaker areas
 - c. Increase 3 - 5 strengths to the 90th percentile
 - d. Work hard on personal growth and development
9. Most 360 multi-rater surveys:
 - a. Are built on predictive evidence that what they're measuring correlates to performance outcomes
 - b. Provide insights on how to build strengths
 - c. Leave most participants feeling positive and energized to improve
 - d. None of the above
10. Leadership cross training is:
 - a. Based on the companion competencies that build strengths from good to great
 - b. Designed to cross-connect and improve weaker areas
 - c. Impossible because there's no map
 - d. Mostly just for athletes and elite executives

TWEET READING: RECOMMENDED ONLINE RESOURCES

This section summarizes last month's LinkedIn Updates and Twitter Tweets about online articles or blog posts that I've flagged as worth reading. These are usually posted on weekends when I am doing much of my reading for research, learning, or leisure.



My original tweet commenting on the article precedes each title and descriptor from the original source:

Another good example of the evidence-based approach Zenger Folkman brings to the exciting new field of strengths-based leadership development.

["How Poor Leaders Become Good Leaders"](#) - Jack Zenger and Joe Folkman
<http://blogs.hbr.org/>

"Using 360-degree feedback data we were able to track what the leaders who'd made the most significant progress were doing. Practically all of them (more than 80%) significantly improved their ability to executive nine particular leadership skills."

As a gardener I love how Bob uses this metaphor to illustrate Zenger Folkman research on three competencies for inspiring and motivating.

["The Gardener's Shadow – Thoughts on the Importance of "Being There" - Bob Sherwin](#)
<http://zengerfolkman.wordpress.com>

"The physical presence of a leader in the workplace is good measure of the leader's interest, concern, and willingness to do the work it takes to develop a great organization."

READ THE LEADER LETTER IN TWICE WEEKLY INSTALLMENTS

The items in each month's issue of *The Leader Letter* are first published in my twice weekly [blog](#) during the previous month.



If you read each blog post (or issue of *The Leader Letter*) as it's published over twelve months you'll have read the equivalent of one of my books. And you'll pick up a few practical leadership tips that help you use time more strategically and tame your E-Beast!

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 or connect with me on [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), [FaceBook](#), or my [blog](#)!

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

Jim





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The CLEMMER Group
10 Pioneer Drive, Suite 105, Kitchener ON N2P 2A4
Phone: (519) 748-1044 ~ Fax: (519) 748-5813
E-mail: service@clemmer.net
<http://www.clemmergroup.com>