

Moose on the Table

A Novel Approach to Communications @ Work

■ About the Author

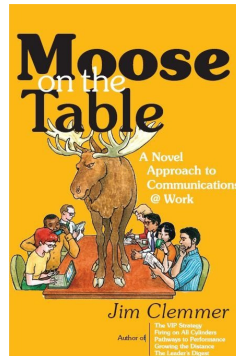


Jim Clemmer is a popular author and columnist, and is a regular guest on radio and television programs. For over 25 years Jim's practical leadership approaches have been inspiring action and achieving results. His keynote presentations and workshops/retreats, best-selling books, columns, and newsletters have helped hundreds of thousands of people worldwide.

Jim has written *The VIP Strategy: Leadership Skills for Exceptional Performance*; *Firing on All Cylinders: The Service/Quality System for High-Powered Performance*; *Pathways to Performance: A Guide to Transforming Yourself, Your Team, and Your Organization*; *Growing the Distance: Timeless Principles for Personal, Career, and Family Success*; *The Leader's Digest: Timeless Principles for Team and Organization Success*; and *Moose on the Table: A Novel Approach to Communications @ Work*, the subject of this summary.

Jim holds the Certified Speaking Professional (CSP) designation, the highest earned designation in Professional Speaking, which is awarded by the International Federation for Professional Speakers to less than 3% of the estimated 15,000 speakers in the world. Jim is recognized as a Certified Training and Development Professional (CTDP) by the Canadian Society for Training and Development. Jim is also a Practitioner in Residence for the masters (MAsc) and doctoral (PhD) students in the University of Waterloo's Industrial/Organizational Psychology program.

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■ The Big Idea

Have you heard of the 'Moose-on-the-Table' metaphor? The moose symbolizes a communications problem that grows larger, breeds and increases the size of the herd when left unaddressed. Failure to address "moose issues" results in waste and additional work, reduced productivity, workplace accidents, and plummeting morale. They cripple workplaces across the globe, sapping energy from staff and weakening entire organizations. Does your team or organization have moose?

This book explores the fear-courage continuum through the struggles and experiences of the central character, Pete Leonard. *Moose on the Table* is one manager's story of finding and overcoming fear, one little step at a time.

■ Why You Need This Book

In this “edutaining” organizational fable, you'll get realistic scenarios and solutions, showing how individuals and organizations should address communication issues that cost organizations millions or even billions of dollars in wasted effort every year.

This book will help everyone at all levels within an organization deal with the moose around the office.

■ Running on Empty

Thanks to the poor health, poor relationships, and poor choice of career path being suffered by our protagonist Pete, he's going through the lowest moments of his life. He's been diagnosed with high cholesterol levels and constantly elevated blood pressure, and to make things worse he's fifty pounds overweight. He rarely gets to see his wife and his kids have been stubborn and immovably ill-natured.

In a recent conversation with his boss, the Senior Vice-President of client services at Newton-Millbank Tech Services, Pete's been informed that trust and communication has been really quite low in the operations department of a certain division – a division he heads.

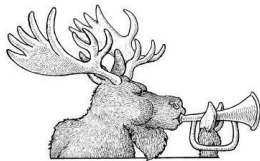
Morale is down very low; as a result, absenteeism is rife and client service levels are down the drain. Pete's challenge is to get his people to start talking to each other and communicate more and better, or else they all might drown together when the ship finally sinks.

As Pete's doctor explains, research is now showing that a person's emotional state is a major factor in heart disease and a host of other illnesses; a study of over ten thousand heart-attack victims from dozens of countries shows that in the year before their heart attack, most were under much higher levels of stress from work, family, financial, and other factors than a comparable control group.

After having heard this, Pete decides that he really needs to get his life in order.

■ The Call of the Riled

A client service management meeting is set for Pete's group to address the reasons why their sales are in free-fall. During the meeting, the following reasons were determined:



- Delayed decision making
- Lack of accountability
- Lack of urgency
- Lack of openly sharing information
- Departmentalism and turf wars

During the meeting, it becomes apparent how laid-back Pete's people are. When their boss pushes hard for an explanation as to why a particular project is late or not completed at all, he's given quiet, monotone explanations, such as factors beyond the control of that group, how hard everyone had been working on it, and how the project was being researched further.

The meeting ends with the boss trying to motivate them to get their act together and start getting along. They really have to start working together as a team.

After the meeting, Pete contemplates on what transpired as he slouches in his chair. Moments later, he goes wide-eyed as he sees what seems to be a large cow or horse nibbling on the lower branches of a small tree. They lock eyes and Pete feels that he's really beginning to lose it this time.

■ The Dread POETS Society

After that unsettling meeting, all the staff decide to grab a few drinks and seek solace in what they call the POETS society, the Piss-On-Everything-Till-Sunrise Society, as they humorously refer to their after-work drinking group.

During the session, they try to motivate Pete into finally putting some leadership into the team, and even tell him that despite his obvious failings, he's still a lot better than their big boss, Doug, the Senior VP who's apparently just good at kissing up to those above him and kicking down those below.

As it turns out, Pete really used to pull his weight at work (if you'll pardon the pun). He was the initiator of many growth plans for the company. He made waves as the man behind SCORPIO – an innovative new client service plan and a stunning success by any standard – and became one of the key contributors to NMTS's steep growth curve.

In the end, Pete is invited to join a workshop and get ideas for leadership improvement. On his way home, strangely enough, he again sees the strange animal he had seen the night before.

■ Of Moose and Managers

The key theme of the workshop session is Courageous Leadership. It's all about:

- Having the courage to navigate unwanted change
- Having the courage to strengthen leadership in the face of daily management crises and technical issues
- Having the courage to talk about sensitive issues being avoided
- Having the courage to listen to what you don't want to hear

Jason, the workshop trainer, presents a Navigator-Survivor-Victim Chart, as follows:

MODE	DEFINITION	RESOLUTION
<i>Navigator</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tries to capitalize on the problem or adversity• Tries to figure out how to make the best of a bad situation	Navigators make it happen.
<i>Victim</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bitter, helpless• Can easily frame a problem so narrowly that it's all you can see• Loses perspective and can't see the huge amount of good or positive factors	Victims ask, 'Why does this always happen to me?'
<i>Survivor</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Always chooses how to respond	Survivors watch it happen.

Moose on the Table

by Jim Clemmer

Further on, Jason discusses how silence kills organizations – even literally killing people when safety issues aren't addressed. When people in an organization fail to communicate, it leads to a myriad of problems. Some of the common ones are:

1. Hiding/suppressing information
2. Minimizing or avoiding big problems/issues
3. Helplessness, cynicism, and apathy
4. Turf protection and silos or departmentalism
5. Team members dislike and avoid each other
6. Blame-storming, fault-finding, and sniping (often wrapped in “humorous” zingers)
7. Lower respect for self and others
8. Mediocre meetings
9. Messengers are shot and wounded, and resolve never to make that mistake again
10. Lobbying, politicking, and decision-making are done outside the meeting
11. The boss makes decisions, then uses meetings to “hold court” or “discuss” what’s happening
12. “Are there any questions?” is really a dare from a boss to say anything that’s considered to be disagreeable

What keeps people from having courageous conversations? **FEAR.**



As Pete takes the elevator after the session, he catches a blur of brown in the corner of his left eye just as somebody smashes into him and flings him toward the far wall. Then everything goes black.

■ Elf Perception

After coming to, Pete meets Alfred, who claims to be his guardian elf, sent to help him deal with the moose problem. With this, Pete concludes to himself that these moose are what he's been seeing lately.

The moose seem to thrive in environments where people have real issues communicating with each other and spend a lot of time dodging problems they know have to be resolved. The more the issues are ignored, the bigger the moose grow.

Pete definitely has to speak up and deal with the moose.

■ The Mighty Maynard

Alfred tells Pete the story of a mighty hunter named Maynard, who was legendary for his superb hunting skills, but who through time began to bask in his own glory. His temper became more volatile and his own followers began to fear him. With this change, Maynard's second-in-command, Alvin, became his spokesperson. Eventually, a depressing pattern emerged and

hunters started leaving them. Just when everything seemed to be going well, the two of them were finally left by everybody.

As Pete reviewed his workshop book, he came up with some useful revelations:

- Regrets for actions we don't take drip acid on our soul.
- Fear is all in our head. It's a mind-game we play on ourselves.
- Fear is a powerful form of imagery – it's our own terrifying optical illusion.
- Fear lets the air out of the tires that roll us along through life. If enough air is released, the tires will be damaged and we'll be forced to slow down or stop to address the problem.
- What would you do if you weren't afraid?

Pete remembered the elf's words to him: *There's a deeper meaning to words and the world around you that you're choosing to ignore. That's a big reason you've got so many moose in your life.*

■ That Slinking Feeling

After all this, Pete finally comes to the point where he decides to do what he can to make everything better. With the help of Jason, he gets people to sit down with him and comes up with the following discussion points:

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

1. Sniping, potshots, or put downs are not allowed.
2. Discussions are to focus on the problem, issue or behaviour and avoid personal put downs, judgmental statements, or sweeping generalizations.
3. Everyone is to participate and stay engaged in the conversation.
4. No cutting each other off, finishing someone else's sentences, or engaging in side conversations.
5. Those with dissenting opinions are at least to feel their point of view was heard.
6. Phones, pagers, e-mail devices, and non-participants are not to interrupt the meeting.

THREE STEPS FOR EXCELLENT MOOSE-HUNTING ADVICE

1. Stop picking up and throwing moose pies at each other and talk about the moose instead.
2. Agree to collectively jump up at the same time and tackle the moose when it appears, since any one individual will probably be killed if she/he tries it alone. Moose are really dangerous.
3. Figure out how the moose got in the room and block that path to prevent any more of them from getting in.

THREE BASIC WAYS FOR A TEAM TO MAKE A DECISION

Command – made by a team member (often the boss) without any input from other team members

Consultative – made by a team member after consulting others who have knowledge or who must be committed to the decision for it to work.

Consensus – made by the entire team as a group.

■ Facing the Bull

To put solid plans in place in able to move them forward, the team develops top 5 Strategic Imperatives, through an exercise called “bucketing” – grouping similar ideas.



1. **CULTURE CHANGE/LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT.** This includes reducing victim-thinking, bringing core values to life, increasing teamwork/ownership, and developing leadership skills at all levels.
2. **PROCESS MANAGEMENT.** Reducing costly errors and rework, improving client service levels, and breaking down department silos.
3. **COMMUNICATIONS.** Increasing two-way conversations up, down, and across operations; identifying and dealing with moose issues; and using e-mail more effectively.
4. **DECISION MAKING AND ACCOUNTABILITY.** Cutting bureaucracy by reducing approval levels/bottlenecks, simplifying systems, and getting everyone to take more responsibility for their work.
5. **MANAGEMENT TEAM DYNAMICS.** Increasing meeting effectiveness, reducing turf protection, and increasing teamwork and coordination.

■ Two Steps Forward, Four Hooves Back

When the Senior VP Doug sends out an email to all his managers about the company's growing absenteeism problem, the main part of the message reads as follows:

Clockroaches are those employees who are as useful as a roach and mooch off our time clock. Judging by the parking lot at starting and quitting times, we have way too many Clockroaches around here. I am fed up with you telling me about their excuses, whining, and complaining. We need a new standard for you and them: impress me or leave.

This pushes Pete to finally speak up and tell Doug that calling their staff clockroaches is not consistent with the company's value of treating each other with respect. After having been told this, the embarrassed Doug requests Pete to come up with a solid action plan for his own team.

Pete is lost in thought about his upcoming meeting/confrontation with Doug, but the words of the Alanis Morissette song playing on the radio jolt him back to reality: "For the ocean is big and my boat is small / Find the courage."

■ In the Winner's Cycle

The meeting takes a turn for the worse – and then some. Pete's action plans for his own team and department aren't accepted by Doug. As a matter of fact, to add insult to injury, Doug fires Pete, blaming him for all the mess that the company has gone through, and fixating on Pete's 'moose' ideas.

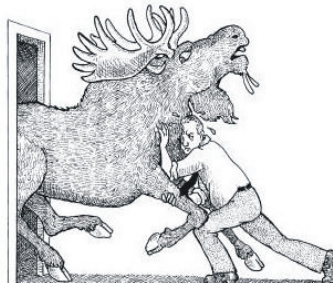


Pete accepts his fate gladly and takes his firing in stride, thinking that he'll take this opportunity to get closer to his poor neglected wife and kids. He updates his resume and tries applying for managerial positions elsewhere.

As it turns out, however, Newton-Millbank Tech Services isn't through with Pete yet. To Pete's complete surprise, Cy Garnet, Doug's boss, invites Pete for an interview over lunch.

In the course of the interview, Pete learns from Cy that after his departure from the company, Doug has become completely unbearable. As a result, conditions for the company just ended up worse. And in the end, they had to let go of Doug.

Together with the rest of the financial board, Cy offers Pete the Senior Vice-President position, Doug's job – a complete turnaround from what had transpired weeks before. And after thinking it over for a good number of days and after talking it over with his wife, Pete accepts the offer and returns to NMTS.



The next few months involve some of the hardest work of Pete's professional life. The hours are long and the discussions difficult. He takes a few intensive days of training filled with lots of practice and feedback to improve his speaking and presentation skills. It proves to be a somewhat ego-bruising exercise, but in the end, the payoff is huge.

Pete would look back years later and say it was one of the most significant personal-growth investments he'd ever made – and it was a great achievement for NMTS as well.

Pete's personal and organizational turnaround is quite a story. *Be inspired by his courageous leadership, and resolve to face your own moose as well!*

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