

# Meet Ken Blanchard

## Q. *How did you get involved in leadership, and what motivates you to continue?*

My involvement in leadership began in the 1960s, when I was an assistant dean at Ohio University. The chairman of the Management department, Dr. Paul Hersey, asked me if I would be interested in writing a textbook with him. That book became *Management of Organizational Behavior*. It introduced Situational Leadership®, a whole new way of looking at management. Now in its 10<sup>th</sup> edition, the book has been a bestseller in the field for over 40 years.

When I was on sabbatical in the late 1970s, I gave a speech—“Different Strokes for Different Folks”—at a Young Presidents Organization event. People were so excited about it that they insisted my wife, Margie, and I start our own management consulting company. We went from not knowing how to balance our own checkbook in 1979 to running a company that today has more than 300 employees and offices around the world.

In 1982, the book I wrote with Spencer Johnson, *The One Minute Manager*®, was published and went on to sell more than 13 million copies. I guess you could say that book was a trendsetter, because it was the first well-known business parable, a format that is still quite popular today.

What keeps me motivated to continue is that I believe the world is in desperate need of a different leadership role model. When you look at leaders around the world—whether they’re running departments or countries, businesses or religious institutions—you see too many people focusing on self-serving goals. We need a new leadership model that focuses not only on goal accomplishment, but also on the greater good.



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### Q. *How do you differentiate between managers and leaders? Can a person be both?*

I don't get involved in trying to differentiate between managers and leaders, because when people talk about the difference, managers always come in last. Warren Bennis, one of the great thought leaders in our field, said "leaders do the right thing and managers do things right." I think doing the right thing and doing things right are both key parts of servant leadership.

When I talk about servant leadership, people think I'm talking about the inmates running prison and trying to please everybody. They don't understand that there are two primary aspects of leadership.

The first aspect is vision/direction. Leadership is about going somewhere, and if people don't know where you're going, your chances of getting there are very slim. In this area, the traditional hierarchical pyramid is alive and well. This doesn't mean leaders don't involve others in crafting the vision, but the responsibility falls to the hierarchical leadership. People look to their organizational leaders for direction. Vision/direction is the *leadership* part of servant leadership.

The second aspect of leadership is implementation—how do you live according to the vision and direction and attain the established goals? When implementing the vision/direction, servant leaders turn the hierarchical pyramid upside down and work for their people, doing everything they can to help their people implement the vision. This is the *servant* part of servant leadership. Leadership is about setting a vision/direction—the traditional leader role—as well as implementation—the traditional manager role.

Can some people do both roles? Yes, some can. But some people are better at the visionary role. If they're good leaders, they gather people around them who can take the implementation role and move it forward. Other people are better at putting things into practice. These people make sure they have someone who can play the visionary role. Both roles have to be applied if you're going to be an effective leader.

### Q. *What is the best way to develop a new idea, product or service?*

Work with other people and be open to their brilliance, especially if creative thinking is not your strong suit. We have a saying around Blanchard: "No one of us is as smart as all of us." When you work with other people, you can tap into collective genius.

### Q. *Who has been your most influential mentor or role model?*

I'd have to say my father and then probably Norman Vincent Peale—they both were great role models. My wife, Margie, has also been a fabulous mentor through the years. I've always been in a learning mode. I've been so blessed with the people I've been able to write books with, because I love winners. Writing a book with Don Shula (*Everyone's a Coach*) was such a joy, and then Colleen Barrett from Southwest Airlines (*Lead with LUV*), and Garry Ridge, president of WD-40 Company (*Helping People Win at Work*)—those were all great experiences. Everyone I have written a book with has been a mentor in some way to me. My mother used to ask me why I always wrote with coauthors and didn't just write books by myself. I'd tell her, "Mom, I already know what I know. I want to learn something new." The only reason you'd want to work with someone on a book is if you can both learn from it. I'm always looking for mentors. I like people who go for it, no matter what their age, and who push the envelope.

### Q. *What has been the highlight of your publishing career?*

*The One Minute Manager*<sup>®</sup> has to be the highlight of my publishing career, because it got me to a level where people would be interested in writing with me. I know I wouldn't have had all the coauthors I've had without it—it was such a ridiculously successful book. Margie and I met Spencer Johnson, my coauthor, at a cocktail party in November of 1980. He was a children's book writer. Margie met Spencer first, hand-carried him over to me, and said, "You two should write a children's book for managers. They won't read anything else." With that, *The One Minute Manager*<sup>®</sup> was born. We signed a publishing contract with William Morrow in January 1982 and the book was launched on NBC's *Today* show in September of that year. The book went on the *New York Times* bestseller list the following week and stayed there for quite a few years.

### Q. *What's the best advice you've ever received?*

My mom was a great advice giver—she said, "Don't act like you're better than anybody else, but don't let them act like they're better than you. Everybody's got a pearl of beauty in them—just find it." That's a pretty powerful thing. "God didn't make any junk," she always told me. "People are beautiful but some people hide it better than others. If you hang in there, you can find it." I think that's a good lesson.

### Q. *If you could only teach one message from now on, what would it be?*

I think the most powerful message in my teaching is the second secret of *The One Minute Manager*<sup>®</sup> which is to catch people doing things right and accent the positive. When I visit different organizations, people are still saying that the only way they know they're doing a good job is that nobody's yelled at them lately—no news is good news. That bothers me and makes me sad. When you teach and when you lead, you need to go after people's hearts. If they understand the message in their heart, they're going to use it. You can't fake it. If you really have it in your heart that you're there to serve, not to be served, you don't have to learn the theory. The theory reinforces what's already in your heart.

### Q. *How do you start a typical day? Do you have any rituals?*

I enter my day slowly, with solitude, prayer or meditation, and reflection. In this way I open myself to ideas and inspiration that come from outside my own narrow mindset. I try to re-read my mission, vision, and values each day, which motivates me to be creative and help others.