

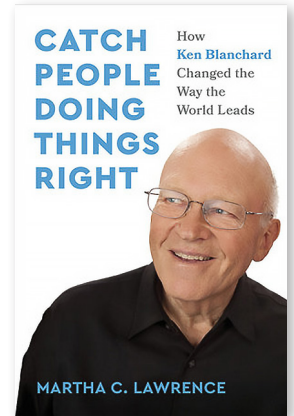


Executive Book Summaries®

Catch People Doing Things Right

How Ken Blanchard Changed the Way the World Leads

by **Martha C. Lawrence**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

In *Catch People Doing Things Right*, author Martha C. Lawrence explores the extraordinary life and influence of Ken Blanchard, one of the world's most beloved leadership thinkers. Through a thoughtful, chronological narrative, Lawrence demonstrates how every season of Ken's life—his triumphs, setbacks, and daily encounters—was shaped by his choice to learn, grow, and serve others. At the heart of Ken's story is a consistent and unwavering belief: true leadership begins with humility, love, and the desire to help others succeed.

Blanchard's life offers countless reminders that influence is never too small and that no act of kindness or encouragement is ever wasted. By highlighting his devotion to relationships, Lawrence reveals how Ken turned networking into something far more meaningful—an authentic investment in friendship, trust, and collaboration. His journey through some of society's most turbulent decades shows how resilience, optimism, and faith can carry leaders through moments of uncertainty.

Above all, *Catch People Doing Things Right* is a testament to Ken's conviction that leadership is not about power or position, but about people. His example encourages readers to lead with compassion, nurture meaningful connections, and embrace the transformative impact of serving others.

IN THIS EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARY YOU WILL:

- Understand how Ken Blanchard exhibited strong leadership professionally and personally, by leading with heart and servanthood first before anything else
- Explore the life and legacy of Ken Blanchard including his early years where he first discovered his love for people
- Learn how Ken's businesses and many professional endeavors flourished and the different forms of sacrifice required of him and others
- Discover how to become a strong and intuitive leader who impacts more than just spreadsheets, but generations to come

Family Roots and Childhood, 1939–1944

When asked about his greatest influences, Ken always credits his parents. “They were incredible people,” he says. “The lessons I learned from my mom and dad have stuck with me all my life.”

Ted Blanchard and Dorothy Heidenreich (Ken’s parents) married on April 17, 1926. Although they wanted children, the couple was childless during the first eleven years of their marriage. Then, just when they had begun looking into adoption, Dorothy became pregnant. Ken’s sister, Sandy, was born on January 4, 1937.

Ken’s primary companion in those early years was his sister, Sandy, just two years older than he was. The neighborhood was home to a lot of young parents like the Blanchards, so as Ken and Sandy grew, they had plenty of other children to play with. Many of Ken’s favorite childhood activities took place in the backyard of their New Rochelle house, which featured a sprawling maple tree surrounded by a brick patio. During the day—weather permitting—the family would play croquet in the yard. On warm nights, they would sit on the patio, sip cold drinks, and enjoy sing-alongs.

Ken remembers the moment when he was standing at the top of the stairs on a Christmas Day, bursting with excitement and anticipation. “My heart was pumping when Nana looked back up at me and said, ‘My heavens! You won’t believe what’s down here!’”

Years later, Ken would become famous for communicating his optimism to others, and that first memory—filled with excitement—would be reflected in his life philosophy:

“Life is a very special occasion!”

During his preschool years (1942–1944), Ken did not see his father, who stayed overseas protecting the Marines and the “frogmen” (now called Navy SEALs) in the major Pacific battles, including Saipan. Luckily, the neighborhood served as a buffer during that time. Ken had a number of surrogate dads on the street who were happy to step in for Ted.

In childhood, Ken did discover a love for competitive sports.

Basketball became Ken’s passion. He played in the basement every day and practiced shooting for hours on end.

Ted Blanchard, the Navy officer who had retained the respect of his men while commanding them into dangerous conditions in the Pacific, didn’t waste opportunities to share leadership lessons with Ken, even when watching sports.

Ken’s first major league baseball game left a lasting impression on him.

He learned a key lesson that would inform his future career: leadership wasn’t about having a title or a position. After all, Slaughter and Musial were baseball players, not presidents or kings. Yet how they behaved had an impact on others. That day, Ken realized that by behaving in ways that influenced others, anyone could be a leader.

Leadership Beginnings, 1945–1957

Ken’s first memorable interaction with a Black person was through playing city basketball in the sixth grade.

His father had installed a backboard and basket on the outside wall of the garage. Ken practiced every day and honed his skills by playing games at the YMCA, with church leagues around town, and at school. He became an excellent basketball player and was particularly gifted at shooting.

Ken’s elementary school team had reached the finals of the city basketball championship, where it was pitted against the formidable Lincoln team, composed of highly talented players from the predominantly Black school.

His team ended up beating Lincoln—a major upset.

One of Lincoln’s star players was a huge Black kid named Earl Forte. His friends and teammates called him Meatball. After the game, Ken went into the locker room to change his shoes and saw the star player sitting on a bench.

Ken went over and patted Forte on the back. “Good game, Meatball.”

The Lincoln player whirled around, grabbed Ken, threw him against the locker, and growled, “Only my friends call me Meatball!”

Ken looked into the eyes of the oversized boy who had him by the throat and said with a smile, “Well, why don’t we become friends?”

Meatball ended up being one of Ken’s strongest supporters and campaign managers when Ken ran for president of their junior high school, and their friendship lasted long beyond their school days.

Basketball became Ken’s entrée into the non-White social circle of New Rochelle, where his easygoing, egalitarian nature attracted many new friends.

Leaders are great not because they have power,
but because people trust and respect them.

Even in the 1950s, New Rochelle ranked among the most diverse small cities in the nation. Once schools began to desegregate, Ken was exposed to classmates from multiple cultures.

The different schools Ken went to provided him with some of his best learning and development experiences, because they taught him firsthand about diversity. With good friends from a variety of backgrounds, Ken learned how to connect with, love, and appreciate people from all walks of life.

Friends described Ken as the kid who was popular with the whole class. Ethnicity or background made no difference to him—if you were a nice person, he was your friend.

Ken had a strong role model in his father. Inspired by his dad's leadership in the Navy, he decided to run for president of his seventh-grade class. When he told his father about his plans, Ted let him in on an early leadership lesson. "You need to get everyone laughing right away," he advised his son.

"Now that you have a leadership position, don't ever use it. Leaders are great not because they have power, but because people trust and respect them." Ken never forgot his father's words, and they served as inspiration for his later work about leading through positive influence rather than position power.

Serving in leadership positions at school gave Ken a meaningful way to channel his popularity and learn about leadership and development firsthand.

The Cornellian, 1957–1961

While Ken had always been bright, he had never been particularly good at taking tests. "My mind just didn't work that way," he commented later in life. "Today, I would never be able to get into an Ivy League school on the basis of my SAT scores."

Nevertheless, at Cornell he developed an academic regimen and stuck with it, thanks in large part to his sister, who always encouraged him to be the best possible version of himself he could be.

As she had in high school, Sandy pushed Ken to aim high and be his best self, both academically and athletically. During his freshman and sophomore years, when Sandy was still on campus, she insisted that Ken meet her regularly in the library to study.

Ken worked at his studies, but not at the expense of his social life. Spending time with friends and making new ones was as important to Ken as getting good grades.

While fraternities on Ivy League campuses in the 1950s were overwhelmingly White and economically privileged, Ken did not succumb to the exclusive, us-versus-them culture of fraternity living. His high school habit of making friends from various ethnic and social groups continued during college. He had friends all over campus, and off campus as well.

Later in his life, Ken was asked to identify something he did when he was young that was considered unique. His answer was, "I liked everyone! Kids I went to school with used to kid me about that all the time. Why? Because even young kids hang out in groups and make fun of kids that aren't a part of their gang."

Ken had been taught by his father to look for leadership role models. He discovered a powerful one during his freshman year at Cornell, when Martin Luther King Jr. came to speak at Sage Chapel on campus.

The first thing Ken noticed about Dr. King was the warm and caring way the great civil rights leader greeted him and his co-usher—making Ken feel as if they were the most important people in the world.

Dr. King's sermon that day was filled with that same warmth and caring inspiration. The topic was "Loving Thy Neighbor as Thyself."

Margie, 1961–1962

At 22, Ken was no stranger to girls. He had dated in high school and college, but he had yet to fall in love.

His parents stressed the importance of saving himself for someone special, someone he could make a lifetime commitment to. Someone like Marjorie "Margie" McKee.

Margie was intrigued by Ken. His reputation preceded him: because he had served in student government, she already knew who he was when her then-boyfriend, Looper, introduced her to him. Although Ken's fraternity had a reputation for being exclusive, she knew he had friends all over campus. Ken's outgoing nature appealed to her.

As she spent time with Ken, Margie was struck by three things. First, by how much he loved people. He had a wide variety of friends, and she could see that each would have taken a bullet for him, and vice versa. Most of the guys she knew tended to stick to their own cliques. Ken was different.

Second, Margie noticed Ken was a hard worker, poised to have a robust career. Third, she was intrigued that he had his sights set on working in the university and being a dean. No matter what he ended up doing, she knew he would be successful—as a pastor, politician, educator, coach, entertainer, or something else. Somehow, she sensed that he was going to do something important.

Ken and Margie were married on June 23, 1962, at Glenside Presbyterian Church in Glenside, Pennsylvania.

Thwarted Dreams, 1962–1966

Ken's education plan involved being part of the Preceptorial Studies Program at Colgate, where he served as an academic and social advisor to about twenty-five students. During that school year, Ken and Margie had all of the students over for dinner, one at a time. Margie gradually honed her cooking skills, learning how to keep rolls from burning and have all the elements of a meal come together at one time.

Ken's love for basketball didn't wane in graduate school. He played every chance he could and helped coach the freshman team at Colgate during the 1962–1963 season.

While pursuing his PhD, Ken found a full-time position suitable for a doctoral candidate: conducting research for the School of Education with the New York State Regents Advisory Committee on Educational Leadership—a group that made leadership recommendations concerning college presidents, superintendents of schools, and their governing boards.

Meanwhile, Margie continued working as a speech therapist. She had found a position at the Cornell speech clinic, helping

foreign students improve their English accents and assisting others with stuttering problems. More and more, however, she felt as though she didn't know enough to be effective. She realized that she needed to go back to school. So, she applied to the master's program at Cornell, where she continued her studies in child development and speech science.

1965 was a notable year for Ken and Margie. In June, Margie was awarded her master's degree in speech therapy, and on August 3, she gave birth to their first child, Kenneth Scott Blanchard.

As Ken was finishing his PhD coursework, he turned his attention to finding a job to support his growing family. He envisioned a career in university administration, working as a liaison between the faculty and the students.

Ken had spent the last nine years in higher education preparing to be a university administrator. Now, at twenty-seven, he had completed the coursework and dissertation for his PhD in education administration and leadership. He had a wife he adored, a beautiful son, and another child on the way. The one thing he didn't have—but desperately needed—was a job.

A Key Partnership, 1966–1970

Ken's mother, Dorothy, had instilled in him a firm belief in the power of positive thinking. She'd taught him that setbacks were a part of life and that when they came along, he shouldn't put his head down and mumble. Instead, he should keep his head up and look for opportunities.

In the fall of 1966, Ken and Margie—who was pregnant with their second child—moved with their 1-year-old son, Scott, to Athens, Ohio.

In the mid-1960s, Athens was a small municipality with a local population of about 5,000, which quadrupled when the university's 15,000 students came to town. Ken would now be working for the largest employer in town: Ohio University, located in a sprawling cluster of brick buildings on 1,800 acres.

Teaching tapped into Ken's natural talents. With his sense of humor and easygoing attitude, students liked him immediately, and he enjoyed being in front of the class. Although he had originally set his sights on university administration, he was learning that engaging with students suited his extroverted disposition far better than pushing paper behind a desk somewhere.

The most successful leaders flex their approach to match the needs of each person they are leading.

At Ohio University, Ken's interest in leadership was front and center, and he took advantage of every opportunity to deepen his knowledge of the subject.

Life in Ohio was not all academia. On March 30, 1967, Margie gave birth to their second child, Deborah Kyle Blanchard. Meanwhile, their son was growing into a curious toddler. On weekdays, Ken drove 3-year-old Scott to Ohio University's nursery school. On weekends, they would often go into town together.

Developing a New Leadership Philosophy, 1970–1976

In 1970, Ohio University was a hotbed of new and innovative ideas in just about every academic discipline.

Ken also continued to teach and refine the Situational Leadership model he had developed with Paul Hersey at Ohio University, introducing his students to the idea that there was no single best way to lead people, and that the most successful leaders flex their approach to match the needs of each person they are leading.

Fun was central to learning, as far as Ken was concerned. His goal was to help students learn, and ever since his days at Cornell, the practice of giving A grades to only a select few had rankled him.

Ken wanted as many of his students as possible to succeed—which was why he began handing out his final exams on the first day of each of his classes.

Ken wasn't impressed by the hierarchy, and he had never forgotten that early leadership lesson he learned from his father: "Now that you have a leadership position, don't ever use it. Leaders are great not because they have power, but because people trust and respect them." He thought it was ridiculous when faculty members put on airs and "sounded British" when they were in front of students, then behaved more casually among themselves.

A Company Is Born, 1976–1980

Planning to be in California for a year, Ken and Margie spent the summer of 1976 saying goodbye to friends on the East Coast.

California was a revelation to Ken. The ethos of the Golden State perfectly suited his open, free-spirited nature. In Ohio and on the East Coast, he had chafed against the rigid expectations of academia, and his freewheeling style was often frowned upon. The academic culture in California welcomed creativity and experimentation, and Ken took to it like a bird to the sky.

In October 1976, Jerry Tomas, one of Ken's doctoral students, asked Ken to do a leadership seminar in San Francisco for a group of twenty-nine executives at the Young Presidents' Organization (YPO), where Jerry was serving as director of education.

YPO opened up an entirely new world for Ken.

Ken's presentation to the young presidents in San Francisco went so well that he was invited to speak at YPO's annual weeklong University for Presidents convention, which was being held in Honolulu in February 1977.

After moving to California, Margie had the opportunity to cultivate a long-standing interest in work-life balance. Pulling together her research, she created some seminars on the topic. Her ideas found an audience, and her seminars were well received.

Margie and Ken had enough successful seminars under their belts to convince them that they could make a go of their consulting business. They headed back to the McKee family cottage on Skaneateles Lake in Upstate New York and called their UMass friends together. The group began envisioning what kind of company they might create.

As they talked about building their ideal company, they committed their ideas to paper in a document that laid out the three primary purposes of their dream organization,

The Founders' Dream:

1. To create opportunities for people that we love and care for to work together
2. To make a difference in people's lives
3. To have fun

The One Minute Manager, 1980–1983

Margie introduced Ken to Spencer Johnson, a 41-year-old MD with a curly head of hair who had done medical clerkships at the Mayo Clinic and Harvard Medical School. Spencer had coauthored with his former wife, Ann Donegan, a series of children's books called ValueTales—short biographies of well-known people who had made a positive difference in the world.

Ken invited Spencer to attend a seminar he was conducting the following Monday at the Rancho Bernardo Inn.

At the end of the day, Spencer approached Ken and said, “Forget my parenting book. Let’s write *The One Minute Manager!*”

Over the next few weeks, Ken and Spencer began drafting a parable about a “bright young man who was looking for an effective manager.”

Research showed that only 10% of nonfiction books were read past the first chapter, which is why Ken and Spencer decided to keep the book to no more than 100 pages in length.

They kept producing drafts until people began offering \$10 for a photocopy of the book—not a hardcover, a photocopy. This was remarkable, given that \$10 in 1980 was equivalent to about \$32 in 2025.

Harry Paul owned a print shop called Budget Books. The company specialized in typesetting, designing, and printing, but left it up to the authors to handle distribution and marketing. Given Ken’s seminar business, that was fine with Ken and Spencer.

Harry Paul printed the books and shipped them to Chicago, where Ken and Spencer introduced *The One Minute Manager* to a meeting of the National Restaurant Association. Within half an hour after the session, more than 700 copies of the book had sold in the back of the room at \$15 each—an amount unheard of in book publishing at the time. Ernie Renaud from Jerrico Inc., the parent company of Long John Silver’s, placed an order for 1,200 copies on the spot.

Growing a Global Organization, 1980–1989

With his gift for captivating audiences and a wildly successful book topping the bestseller lists, Ken continued to attract new clients, and Blanchard Training and Development (BTD) scrambled to accommodate them. If they were going to stay in business, Ken and Margie needed more instructors to deliver their cutting-edge training.

Gradually, the company grew its operations to meet the massive increase in demand stimulated by Ken’s mega-bestseller, *The One Minute Manager*. The book served as the foundation for a host of BTD products, including a video. BTD’s *One Minute Manager* training materials and seminars were flying off the shelves. New associates—now called consulting partners—were hired to deliver *One Minute Manager* seminars around the world.

The founders and early associates knew that organizations needed help teaching managers to empower, support, and encourage their people rather than micromanage, bully, or ignore them.

The company’s top values were:

1. Ethical behavior
2. Relationships
3. Success
4. Learning

Finding Faith, 1986–Present

Ken Blanchard was 43 years old when he had the heady experience of becoming a publishing phenomenon. *The One Minute Manager* quickly became an iconic title, quoted in newspapers, magazines, and on television. The book was shorthand for a new trend in business, one that brought a more humanistic approach to managing people. There were no internet or social media to speak of in 1982. Nevertheless, demand for the book and for Ken as a speaker had grown exponentially, and it kept growing.

Ken’s rise from college professor to mega-bestselling author happened in just three short years. While he’d always been popular, suddenly having an international, mainstream audience gave Ken pause. He couldn’t believe his phenomenal success was his alone; he felt something bigger was moving in his life.

When people put you up on a pedestal, the important thing is to not go there with them.

Several months after *The One Minute Manager* hit the best-seller lists, Ken got a call from his old friend Phil Hodges, who was working as a labor relations officer for Xerox in the Los Angeles area.

Due to some circumstances around a bad investment, Phil had a newfound humility, which had led him to reexamine his life. He'd turned to the Bible and found comfort and meaning in God's love, and he was eager to share his experience with Ken.

By the late 1980s, friends and family were noticing a change in Ken, who was beginning to identify as a Christian.

"Ken did proselytize early on as he embraced Christian theology," remembers his friend from Amherst, Dick Evans. "But always, we knew that his motivation was one of love."

In his journal, Ken wrote that he wanted to reach "a place where I feel I've glorified the Lord's name; I've made a difference in the lives of others."

Chief Spiritual Officer, 1990–2001

Ken was pleased by the awards and accolades, but he didn't let them go to his head. "When people put you up on a pedestal," he said, "the important thing is to not go there with them."

In his writings, Ken encouraged people to create a picture of the future that would inspire them to live their best lives. To help them visualize their future, he recommended that people write their own obituaries.

Influenced by findings, Ken formally changed his title from Chairman of the Board to Chief Spiritual Officer. The new title more accurately described his role, which had always been more inspirational than practical.

Ken used his role as Chief Spiritual Officer to communicate the company's vision and values to everyone who worked there. He began to leave daily voicemail messages to the entire company.

He cheered them on by praising their work, sharing inspirational ideas, and sending positive thoughts to those who were dealing with hardships.

Ken often delivered encouraging messages with a touch of humor.

Ken's books increasingly reflected his growing interest in the deeper meaning of success and his conviction that there was more to business than making money.

The Servant Leader, 2001–2007

As Ken's Christian faith matured, his leadership philosophy—which had always been about uplifting people—expanded to emphasize leadership as a sacred responsibility. His speeches began to focus less on productivity and more on serving others.

His belief that Jesus, who "did not come to be served, but to serve," was the greatest leadership role model of all time.

Ken believed how someone handles authority and power is a great measure of maturity.

Since his days coaching Cub Scouts and school basketball teams, he had been practicing servant leadership—whether he called it that or not.

To inspire and educate a new generation of leaders, Ken returned to his role as a professor.

Just as he had done in his days as a full-time college professor, he focused on empowering students. The goal was not for his students to "get an A" in theoretical analysis; it was for them to become better leaders in the real world.

Refiring, Not Retiring, 2007–2020

Generosity had been modeled for Ken from an early age. His mother, Dorothy, had taught him that if he gave from the heart, he would be amazed by the results.

The Ken Blanchard Companies established multiple ways to give. A charity called Blanchard for Others was created to provide funds to those in need. A Give-Back Program encouraged employees to choose a charity to receive a cash donation from the company in their name. The Blanchard

Ambassador Program allowed associates to spend up to forty hours per year, during business hours, in service to others. The Blanchard Institute provided access to training programs and awarded scholarships to students of all ages.

The giving extended to Blanchard employees in the form of Blanchard's gainsharing program: each year, a percentage of operating income was placed in a pool and divided equally among them.

At a time when many people retire or at least slow down, Ken's productivity surged as he approached his 70th birthday.

As he looked back on *The One Minute Manager*, Ken felt that the third secret in the book—the One Minute Reprimand—needed an update.

Thirty years after their first creative writing venture, Ken and Spencer sat down together and rewrote the original edition of *The One Minute Manager*. Much had changed since the early 1980s, and the new draft reflected the realities of a 21st century workplace. In 2015, William Morrow released *The New One Minute Manager* for a fresh generation of leaders.

Leading With Love, 2020–2023

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 tsunami, the revenues of The Ken Blanchard Companies dropped over 30%. In response to the crisis, the company's new president, Scott Blanchard, began sending a series of weekly all-company emails, sharing the stark reality of the financial challenges the company was facing and the hard choices that would be required to survive.

As the weeks went on, it became evident that the company could not sustain the losses and stay in business. For the first time in Blanchard's forty-year history, the leadership team made the painful decision to furlough and, a few months later, lay off employees.

In the case of the coronavirus pandemic, the positive turned out to be a complete overhaul of the way the company did business. After forty years of relying on physical classrooms and face-to-face training, the business pivoted to digital learning and virtual training.

Fortunately, Margie's Office of the Future had anticipated this trend many years earlier, so the company had already begun the transition.

By 2021, Blanchard was able to hire back some of the employees it had lost. So successful were its virtual offerings that 2021 turned out to be an exceptional year, with over \$58 million in revenue. At the year's end, *The San Diego Union-Tribune* once again recognized The Ken Blanchard Companies with a Top Workplaces award, spotlighting its "strong connections with employees and a strong culture of success."

After six decades in the field of leadership, Ken's philosophy had crystallized around a single idea: love.

Ken's son, Scott, who had initially thought that his father's ideas about love and servant leadership were naïve, tested those ideas and adapted them to his own leadership philosophy.

No one was more surprised than Scott to discover—through both solid research and application in the field—that leading with love resulted in business success.



Martha C. Lawrence, executive editor at Blanchard and former editor for Simon & Schuster and Harcourt Publishers, has collaborated with Ken Blanchard for more than twenty years. She has edited hundreds of books, including the multimillion-copy bestseller *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway* and the #1 *New York Times* bestseller *The One Minute Entrepreneur*. She coauthored *Trust Works! Four Keys to Building Lasting Relationships*, winner of the 2014 San Diego Book Award, and is also the author of the award-nominated mystery series featuring private investigator Elizabeth Chase.

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