



# People-Centered Leadership™

**Great leaders have many things in common.**

Perhaps the most important is that they put their people first. But people-centered leadership extends beyond the leaders themselves. Organizations that want to embrace people-centered leadership need to support their leaders through skill development, knowledge, tools, and human resource systems and processes. They need to help their leaders understand their people and meet their needs. And ultimately, they must create the mind-set to foster a culture shift that values people *and* results. In this collection of articles, we explore the concepts and paradigm shifts organizations must consider in order to become truly people-centered.

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People-centered leadership, with its focus on *both* people *and* results, is servant leadership in action.

## What Leading Companies Do

by Ken Blanchard

People-centered leaders care about *both* people *and* results—they know the only way to get results is through their people. So how does this *both/and* philosophy play out in organizations today?

In the past, the predominant thought was that the only reason to be in business was to make money. Given that point of view, customers were certainly somewhat important, since they used the products and services, but people were dispensable. You could downsize them, rank order them, get rid of the bottom 10 percent, and take other liberties because they were perceived as commodities. That's as far from people-centered as you can get.

Great leaders realize that their number-one customer is their people. If they take care of their people, train them, and empower them, those people will become fully engaged and gung-ho about what they do. In turn, they will reach out and take care of their second most important customer—the people who buy their products or services—and turn them into raving fans. These raving fan customers will keep coming back and will tell their friends, thereby becoming part of the sales force. When that happens, the company becomes financially sound, which takes care of their third most important customer—the stockholders.

When you talk about people-centered leadership, you are talking about companies such as Disney in entertainment, Nordstrom in retail, Ritz-Carlton in hospitality, SAP in information technology, Southwest Airlines in transportation, Synovus in finance, Wegman's in grocery—they are all leaders in their respective industries and they all believe in results through people. Rather than profit being the reason for being in business, these companies realize that profit is the applause you get for creating a motivating environment for your people so that they will take care of your customers.

What does this all have to do with The Ken Blanchard Companies and why we say our approach is people centered? The following section will explain how our People-Centered Leadership message is central to the concepts of servant leadership, performance management, One Minute Management, and customer service.

### **Servant Leadership Is People-Centered Leadership**

In many ways, people-centered leadership, with its focus on *both* people *and* results, is servant leadership in action. When some people hear the phrase *servant leadership*, they are confused. They immediately conjure up thoughts of the inmates running the prison, or trying to please everyone. Others think servant leadership is only for church leaders. The problem is that they don't understand leadership. They think you can't lead and serve at the same time. Yet you can if you understand that people-centered leadership has two parts: vision/direction and implementation.

In the visionary role, leaders define the direction and the desired *results*. It's their responsibility to communicate what the organization stands for and wants to accomplish. Kids look to their parents, players look to their coaches, and people look to their organizational leaders for direction. The visionary role is the *leadership* aspect of servant leadership.

Once people are clear on where they are going, the leader's role shifts from being responsible for vision/direction to being responsive to their people through implementation—the second part of people-centered leadership. Implementation is the *servant* aspect of servant leadership where leaders feel their role is to help *people* achieve their goals. They constantly try to find out what people need to perform well and live according to the vision. Servant leaders want to make a difference in the lives of their people and, in the process, impact organizational results. With its emphasis on bringing out the magnificence in people, servant leadership is core to people-centered leadership.

### **People-Centered Leaders Meet the Needs of Their People**

A key aspect of people-centered leadership is performance management. An effective performance management system has three components: performance planning, performance coaching, and performance review. Which of these three do most organizations devote the greatest amount of time to? Unfortunately, it's performance review.

Some organizations do a good job on performance planning by setting very clear goals. However, after goal setting, what do you think happens to those goals? Most often they get filed away and no one looks at them until they are told it's time for a performance review. Then everybody runs around, bumping into each other, trying to find the goals.

Of the three aspects of an effective performance management system, which one do people spend the least time on? The answer is performance coaching. Yet this is the most important aspect of managing people's performance, because it's during performance coaching that the *implementation* aspect of people-centered leadership happens on an ongoing basis.

In Situational Leadership® II (SLII®), we teach that leaders need to master three skills: goal setting, diagnosis, and matching. All three of these skills are initially part of performance planning. If you aren't clear on goals, you can't be a situational leader because the second skill is to diagnose a person's development level on a specific goal or task. It's important to realize, when utilizing SLII® that leaders need to use not only different strokes for different folks, but also different strokes for the same folks on different parts of their job. Why? Because development level varies for each person depending on the specific task or goal. The final skill for the leader is to match the appropriate leadership style to the person's development level on that task or goal. All three of these skills—goal setting, diagnosis, and matching—initially are done during performance planning (vision/direction) between leader and direct report.

Once the leader and direct report have agreed on the goals, the direct report's development level on each of those goals, and the appropriate leadership style needed, the leader moves to the second key aspect of managing people's performance as a situational leader—performance coaching (implementation). Now is when the leader applies the agreed-upon leadership style for the direct report's development level on the task or goal.

An effective performance management system has three components: performance planning, performance coaching, and performance review.

## Three simple secrets of The New One Minute Manager:

- Goals
- Praisings
- Re-Directs

The emphasis in the performance coaching aspect of SLII® is to help people win and accomplish their goals so that when they get to performance review, it *really* is a review—because leader and direct report have been working together on an ongoing basis throughout the designated performance time period.

### Three Secrets Every People-Centered Leader Knows and Uses

In terms of helping people win, the three simple secrets of the New One Minute Manager—One Minute Goals, One Minute Praisings, and One Minute Re-Directs—are helpful and powerful behaviors that every people-centered leader practices regularly. Today, we find leadership to be more of a side-by-side, people-centered partnership. People want to be able to bring their brains to work and make a contribution as early as possible. They want a sense of autonomy, a good relationship with their boss and colleagues, and a continual sense of growing in their competence. People-centered leaders know this, so they are more collaborative in every way.

The first secret, One Minute Goals, is all about vision/direction and performance planning. All good performance starts with clear goals—and people-centered leaders work alongside their people to develop and agree on clear, concise goals.

People-centered leaders know that the second secret, One Minute Praisings, is all about walking around, catching people doing things right, and praising them. They also understand that—although praising people will always be important—it is also necessary for people to eventually learn to recognize their own good performance.

The third secret, One Minute Re-Directs, gets people back on track when they're struggling to achieve a goal or task. Like One Minute Praisings, the ultimate goal is to have people be able to re-direct their own behavior and not always depend on their manager to point out when they might be veering off course.

You can clearly see how the New One Minute Manager demonstrates both aspects of people-centered leadership: vision/direction and implementation. One Minute Goals are all about vision and direction. Without clear goals, people don't know what they need to accomplish. But once the goals are set, the New One Minute Manager moves to implementation, wandering around and catching people doing things right and praising them. And if people are headed in the wrong direction, the manager is there to gently re-direct them and get them back on course. With praising and re-direction, the emphasis is on being a responsive performance coach.

### People-Centered versus Profit-Centered

You can always tell an organization that has a traditional, top-down, profit-centered approach, because when you are dealing with a frontline employee, they are more interested in pleasing their boss than in dealing with your problem. As a result, you are talking to a duck who says, “Quack quack—it's our policy,” “Quack quack—I just work here,” “Quack quack—I didn't make the rules,” “Quack quack—do you want to talk to my supervisor?” Conversely, you can tell when you are dealing with a company who believes in people-centered leadership. Then, when you are talking to a frontline employee, you are talking to an eagle who says, “No problem, I'll take care of it.” That person obviously feels responsible and empowered to represent the organization and to help it achieve its desired results.

## Great Results and Human Satisfaction

To be people-centered means to have the heart of a servant leader, to give direction and support like a situational leader, and to set goals, praise, and re-direct like the New One Minute Manager. All of these leadership models have the same goal: to help people gain confidence and competence so that they can manage their own behavior in as many aspects of their job as possible—eventually becoming autonomous. When that happens you'll know you have an organization that is people-centered, where the environment enables people to find meaning in their work and profit is a by product. People-centered organizations focus on their people. They develop and encourage them to be the best they can be so that they can take care of the customers who eventually take care of the profit. It all goes together. Organizations who practice people-centered leadership know how to achieve *both* great results *and* great human satisfaction.

People-centered leaders see their role as delivering results through people.

# People-Centered Leaders as Architects, Catalysts, and Coaches

By Michael Lurie

Operating in open markets that are more turbulent than ever before, today's organizations face challenges as well as opportunities. Yet many still use a capital-centered leadership model designed for the traditional companies of the industrial economy. As a result, they may experience deep systemic problems in sustaining performance. Leaders today need a model designed for the agile companies of the digital economy: People-centered leadership.

The people-centered leadership philosophy has been honed over thirty-five years of research and experience with the world's leading organizations and is continually evolving. People-centered leadership recognizes that human resources such as creativity, knowledge, skills, and relationships are the true source of value creation—and that engaging people, empowering them to contribute, and providing them value in return are the prime goals of a company. People-centered leaders see their role as delivering results through people.

The traditional approach to leadership was founded on the world view that capital is our most valuable resource, it is scarce, and earning a return on capital is the goal. This bred competition for this resource deeply into the fabric of the industrial economy. Today's open market environment means this approach is increasingly untenable given the abundant resources and choices now available to all stakeholders.

Recognizing that the business world is in a state of constant change, a mind-set of evolution—embracing change, recognizing the new opportunities that arise from every change, and innovating to address those opportunities—is of critical importance. This mind-set is at the heart of transforming traditional companies into people-centered companies. Leaders today must bring about that transformation through personally modeling and encouraging people-centered leadership. To do so, they need to develop new skill sets.

## Skill Sets: Coach, Architect, and Catalyst

People-centered leaders focus on unleashing the power and potential of people and organizations for the greater good. To do so, they practice three key roles:

- **People—The Role of Coach.** The foundational dimension of leadership is all about people, which means leaders need to have a profound understanding of, and skills in, human dynamics—among individuals, leaders, and teams—to engage and empower people.
- **Organizations—The Role of Architect.** The second role leaders must fill is to design the organization—or their part of it—in a way that the organizational system enables and supports the unleashing of human power and potential.

- **Greater Good—The Role of Catalyst.** This third dimension is where leaders need to articulate a powerful and compelling purpose, vision, and culture that attracts and energizes all stakeholders to engage with the organization, create value, and improve the world.

### **The Role of Coach**

The starting point of people-centered leadership is a deep understanding of people and a recognition that each person has the desire to contribute in a meaningful way. It's also about leaders developing a deep, mature awareness of their own unique strengths and needs. Understanding ourselves and others is the foundation of great leadership.

Once we understand people, it becomes obvious why the traditional concept of the leader's role—telling others what to do and making sure they do it—is flawed. This is where coaching comes in. Recognizing that people have naturally high levels of motivation and potential, people-centered leaders focus on two things.

First, they meet with their direct reports to be sure their goals are aligned. They provide appropriate direction and support to enable their people to develop the competence and commitment needed to accomplish those goals.

The next step is to recognize that people are most effective when they work in groups, rather than as individuals. Departmental teams, project teams, and leadership teams are the core work units of today's successful organizations. Effective people-centered leaders are skilled in building high-performing teams through open communication and cross-functional collaboration.

### **The Role of Architect**

Because people have more information and options than ever before, people-centered leaders need to act as architects to design effective business models that will not only meet the needs of their customers and employees but also maximize value for investors, partners, and other stakeholders.

The purpose of all organizations is to produce results—to make something happen. In today's dynamic environment, this means working with focus and persistence in rapid cycles of innovation and execution. Further, as each team or department is just one component of a broader network, extensive collaborating across departments is needed to effectively operate in today's people-centered organizations.

### **The Role of Catalyst**

While individual reward is important to everyone, it is not the sole reason people come to work. We also have a desire to be part of an organizational culture that is about making a difference in the world. Therefore, people-centered leaders need to be catalysts who facilitate the creation of a significant organizational purpose that engages everyone in the workplace. To give shape and form to the purpose, senior leaders must co-create a powerful, shared vision for the company.

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Agreement must be reached about the role leaders at every level need to play in addressing these challenges.

High-performing organizations also have clear values that guide day-to-day behavior. These values must support the organization's purpose and vision and must be clearly described so that people know what behaviors demonstrate the values. A great organization's values are the foundation of its culture, which is shaped by leaders with the involvement of people across the organization. Creating and sustaining an appropriate and effective organizational culture is one of the most powerful drivers of company performance and success.

In summary, to unleash people's power and potential in the twenty-first century, leaders need to be able to understand and coach people, be the architect of people-centered, value-generating business models in their organization, and be the catalyst for an organization-wide commitment to the greater good. In today's world, all three of these roles apply to leaders at every level and are tailored to their appropriate scope of responsibility to facilitate a common language of people-centered leadership.

### **How Can Companies Build People-Centered Leadership Capabilities?**

While the generation born into the information economy is naturally developing the capabilities to navigate it, people born earlier may still be struggling to understand and adapt. Many of today's leaders fall into this latter group. For us, traditional leadership mind-sets and skill sets we've spent years learning and refining are becoming irrelevant.

To close these gaps, promote an empowered and engaged workforce, and deliver sustainable long-term growth. Organizations urgently need their leaders to build a new set of people-centered leadership capabilities.

### **Leadership Development Strategy**

In order to effectively build these new capabilities, an organizational strategy must be crafted around people-centered leadership development. This begins with deep communication among the company's senior leaders around the strategic, organizational, and operational challenges the company is facing. Agreement must be reached about the role leaders at every level need to play in addressing these challenges. This can be expressed in a variety of ways, from formulating a succinct definition of what it means to be a leader in the company to developing a people-centered leadership philosophy and brand that captures and communicates this foundational thinking.

This core vision then needs to be translated into a road map for leadership development. It should define the primary components and integrate elements that make up a comprehensive system for building people-centered leadership capabilities at all levels across the company. This architecture should be composed of three distinct dimensions: corporate, unit, and initiative.

- **Corporate.** The corporate dimension is the familiar notion of the company's leadership pipeline—a horizontal perspective that defines an appropriate leadership development path for each level of leader, as well as clear alignment mechanisms between the levels. The leadership development program at each level needs to balance the complexity of the competencies to be developed and the practicality and economics of the number of leaders involved.

- **Unit.** The second dimension is about crafting a distinctive people-centered leadership development architecture for each operating unit. Each operating unit has a unique role and faces challenges that place unique demands on their leaders. Unit leadership architectures must align with the corporate architecture and also with the business goals and critical issues facing the unit.
- **Initiative.** The third dimension of people-centered leadership development architecture involves the company's major strategic and operating initiatives. In many cases, the leaders tasked with these initiatives have strong operating unit capabilities but lack the kinds of cross-functional project leadership skills needed to deliver such initiatives successfully. Like unit architectures, initiative architectures must align with the corporate architecture and also build the distinctive capabilities needed to effectively execute the initiative at hand.

People-centered organizations understand that a company's most valuable resources are human resources—its only truly unique and sustainable strength. In a free market, these resources can be secured only through the offering of reciprocal value—so win-win collaboration must become the central mechanism for working together, both inside companies and externally. People-centered leadership motivates participants to contribute to the maximum of their individual capabilities and to coordinate their efforts collectively toward optimum creativity, productivity, and impact. Done properly, such a model will create value for all stakeholders and will become a sustainable, positive cycle able to continually adapt to today's environment.

Performance partnership means each individual understands the value they bring to the organization and to their role.

# Performance Partnerships

by Cathy Huett and Joni Wickline

People-centered leaders care about people and also about performance. They understand that the most important success factor in their career, as well as the careers of their people, is positive performance partnerships. People-centered leaders get results—and they do so through people.

Building a performance partnership with an individual takes commitment, time, and diligence. It is a practice that demands ongoing effort, clear communication, risk taking, influence, recovery from mistakes, changes in course, and caring. A people centered leader takes ownership of the process and commits the focus and energy required to build positive performance partnerships. There is a sense of accountability for the successful performance of others.

Performance partnership means each individual understands the value they bring to the organization and to their role. It's about supporting people to continually learn, grow, and intentionally build their brand. If you have ever had a leader who encouraged you and helped you achieve more than you thought you could, you have experienced a positive performance partnership with a people-centered leader.

**Performance partnership has three imperatives:**

1. Why and What: Purpose and Key Goal
2. From and To: Achievement Discussions and Alignment
3. Here and There: Growth, Development, and Positive Cycle

## **Why and What—A Clear Purpose**

Each of us needs to know the purpose of our role. Purpose answers questions such as: *Why am I in this role? What benefit do I provide?* and *What is my brand and special contribution?*

In his book *Start with Why*, Simon Sinek states that to discover your purpose you should ask the question, *Why is that important?* Five times. Sinek believes that under the layers of ordinary answers lies the nugget of purpose.

People-centered leaders help their people uncover this nugget so that they are clear on both their purpose and their value proposition. Then the leader connects the dots from the individual's purpose and role to organizational strategies. Knowing the overarching reason for one's role can mitigate frustrations, guide actions, add energy, and provide long term perspective.

In a survey conducted by The Ken Blanchard Companies, only 37 percent of 700 respondents said they routinely discussed their goals with their leader. We have been taught about the importance of setting goals, yet both leaders and direct reports tend to resist this essential practice. Why is that?

We resist goal setting because we feel it takes too much time, we don't feel competent to write goals perfectly, we don't believe in the goal or align with the plan, or we don't want to be held accountable or hold others accountable.

People often have too many goals, all of equal priority. This creates confusion and a sense of being overwhelmed with the pressure of too many expectations before performance even gets started. Then there is the reality of change. When change is in the air (and isn't it everywhere?) it is hard to maintain goal relevance.

What if you had only one goal to worry about? Like Jack Palance's character, Curly, said in the movie *City Slickers*, "It's the one thing..." that is important. If your purpose is clear, your key goal can become clear as well. What is the top goal that must be achieved, no matter what?

Picture a leader who helps you understand your purpose for being in your role and then clarifies the most important goal you need to focus on. Picture understanding how your role and goal align with the organization's strategies. Picture yourself being able to zero in on what has to be done because of this understanding and clarity. This is a picture of success and satisfaction for you and your leader!

In goal setting, less is more. It may not be possible to have only one key goal—but at least be clear on the most important goal. Clear and meaningful goals get accomplished.

### **From and To—Achievement Discussions**

People-centered leaders discuss with their people where they need to go from (current state) and where they need to go to (goal attained). Achievement and performance go hand in hand. What must be achieved and what are the metrics? Defining the measurables of a role is not always easy, but it sets a clear picture to the individual of what needs to be accomplished.

Achievement metrics should be linked to the why and the what. Things to consider when setting up achievement metrics include:

- What can be measured to monitor the progress of the individual? Where should they go from and to?
- What metrics should be used for the one key goal? Where should they go from and to?

Once the metrics are set for the role, measurement can happen and achievement discussions are set up for success. Having clear metrics linked to the why and the what makes the conversation between leader and direct report easier.

If the people-centered leader has built a positive performance partnership ensuring that the purpose, key goal, and metrics are clear, feedback can be a laser-focused and professional discussion between partners. Feedback is not information only to be given by the leader. Rather, it is to be gathered by both leader and individual and shared. It is not brutal but it is honest. It is based on facts and metrics.

People-centered leaders can create a positive space to share feedback through achievement discussions that consist of a current assessment of progress toward the key goal.

People-centered leaders discuss with their people where they need to go from (current state) and where they need to go to (goal attained).

People-centered leaders know it is their responsibility to create an environment of honesty, measurement, and shared information leading to achievement of the key goal.

The achievement discussion can include:

- Accomplishments to date
- Unexpected changes
- What still needs to be achieved
- Facts, news, status, and other updates
- Maintaining goal focus
- Obstacles to overcome
- Moving the goal forward
- Resources required
- Expanding the key goal

Both individual and leader contribute to this discussion and make appropriate commitments. Achievement discussions build résumés and give the individual the gift of awareness of the metrics that measure their value contribution. People-centered leaders know it is their responsibility to create an environment of honesty, measurement, and shared information leading to achievement of the key goal.

Where there is alignment, discussions are productive and positive. People-centered leaders create alignment among the organization's strategies, team deliverables, and individual responsibilities. Without alignment, you can have busy people working in their own silos on goals that do not connect to the organization's goals and strategies. Without alignment, precious man hours and money can be wasted.

Blanchard recently conducted a survey about alignment of goals and priorities. Participants in training classes were asked if their manager clarifies and aligns goals and priorities for them. Of 455 participants in the survey, fewer than 20 percent reported this kind of alignment.

Alignment is the undercurrent that causes people in organizations to move in the same direction. It is essential for long-term success.

### **Here and There—Growth and Development**

Growth and development are paths to performance. People-centered leaders put their people first, displacing their own ego, agenda, personal needs, insecurities, and ambition. They realize people are the most valuable asset a team or organization has and that the value proposition flows both ways.

People want to grow personally, and develop and expand their skills and competencies. A smart leader makes resources available and keeps conversations flowing about growth and development.

You've probably heard the phrase, *Bloom where you are planted*. People want to bloom! The people-centered leader is the gardener tending the plants and trees, giving them what they need to grow, pulling weeds, shielding from frost, harvesting fruit, and pruning when necessary.

Development opportunities can be formal and obvious by way of structured training, or more subtle by way of exposure and opportunities. Learning new tech skills, mastering public speaking, attending seminars given by thought leaders, or simply being encouraged to think in new ways, pursue a different perspective, or tune into personal values and beliefs are all ways for people to grow.

The specifics of what individuals decide to learn or how they choose to develop aren't as significant as the fact that their people-centered leader knows the importance of growth and development, makes opportunities available, and encourages people to build their skills and knowledge.

People-centered leaders create *centered* people.

When an individual understands the over arching purpose and value proposition of their role, focuses on one key goal, contributes to positive experiences of feedback through achievement discussions, and is planted in soil fertile for growth and development, that person is likely quite centered.

People who are centered understand the meaning of their work, have a clear focus, find their voice, maintain a positive view, and are engaged. They develop self-reliance and confidence and are soon ready to take on whatever comes their way.

People-centered leaders are role models for leadership. But what if you are a leader who has never had a people-centered leader who cared about building a positive performance partnership? No matter. You can begin this positive cycle today and start creating future people-centered leaders.

The essence of people-centered leadership is to recognize that your leadership can either facilitate your people's growth or obstruct it.

# What People-Centered Leaders Understand About Motivation

by Susan Fowler

Human beings long to thrive. We are learners who want to grow, enjoy our work, be productive, make positive contributions, and build lasting relationships—not because of pressure or promises of external rewards, but because it is our nature to make these things happen. Our desire to thrive may be innate, but thriving doesn't happen automatically—especially at work. People gravitate toward psychological growth and integration, but that doesn't guarantee it will happen. Human thriving in the workplace is a dynamic potential that requires nurturing.

Despite your best intentions as a leader, you may unwittingly be trapped in counterproductive practices proven to thwart people's optimal motivation, ultimately leading to a disengaged workforce. The scary thing is that you believe you are doing the right thing. Motivation is one of the most essential yet misunderstood aspects of leadership. Without an understanding of the true nature of human motivation, contemporary science, and alternatives to carrots and sticks, you are probably struggling to find methods that bring out the best in people and sustain their positive energy.

The essence of people-centered leadership is to recognize that your leadership can either facilitate your people's growth or obstruct it.

## Do You Know What Is Motivating Your Employees at Work?

When individuals' rankings of what motivates them are compared to what managers think motivates their employees, the results over the past sixty years continue to prove the point that managers simply misinterpret what motivates their people.

Why the big disconnect? One reason is that leaders depend on their observations of external behaviors and conditions to evaluate their employees' motivation. Unfortunately, it is nearly impossible to understand another person's internal state of motivation by observing their external behavior. For this reason, leaders need to have conversations with their people about their motivational outlook on goals that have been delegated to them.

## Do Employees Know What Motivates Them at Work?

Ironically, another reason for the disconnect between employees and their managers when it comes to motivation is that employees don't understand the true nature of their own motivation.

An employee who feels trapped in her job, feels she is being taken advantage of, or feels overwhelmed by what is being asked of her may ask for more money. Under her breath, she is saying, *They don't pay me enough to put up with this.* What she doesn't understand is that there will never be enough money to make up for the void created when her psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence are not satisfied. People cannot ask for what they don't know they need.

## What Motivates People—The Real Story

Optimal motivation is the result of satisfying three basic psychological needs that lie at the heart of every human being's ability to thrive: autonomy, relatedness, and competence. When people are optimally motivated, they have the positive energy and sense of well-being required to flourish while sustaining the pursuit and achievement of meaningful goals.

The bad news is that we have paid a high price for working with traditional approaches to motivation: stifled creativity and innovation; mental and physical disabilities; high insurance rates; absenteeism and turnover; weak performance; escalating costs and expectations for incentivizing desired behavior; compliance and defiance rather than alliance on goals and initiatives.

The good news is that this is where the real science of motivation emerges as both a radical departure and an exciting opportunity. However, you might find it challenging to take advantage of evidence-based techniques for creating an optimally motivating workplace, if you don't examine deeply embedded beliefs that influence, and maybe even sabotage, your approach to motivation.

### Your Beliefs Determine the Way You Lead

How would you complete these belief statements?

1. It's not personal, it's just \_\_\_\_\_.
2. The purpose of business is to \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Leaders are in a position of \_\_\_\_\_.
4. The only thing that really matters is \_\_\_\_\_.
5. If you cannot measure it, it \_\_\_\_\_.

These are particularly sticky beliefs that can erode motivation. They are so entrenched in our consciousness, we accept them without question. This poses a potential problem: unexplored beliefs become the basis for rules, processes, actions, and your leadership behaviors.

Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to challenge these beliefs by examining how they undermine your people's optimal motivation, and then consider alternative beliefs and best practices.

### Challenge the First Eroding Belief: It's not personal, it's just *business*.

Every day you deliver information, feedback, or news to those you lead that affects their work, livelihood, opportunities, status, income, mood, health, or well-being. How is this not personal? Employees spend more of their waking hours connected to work and interacting with their coworkers than at home with family members. Yet managers believe their actions are not personal and are just business. Are you kidding?

Whatever your beliefs, one thing is true: What you say and do feels personal to the people you lead. Challenge the belief that it's not personal, it's just business. Activate optimal motivation with someone you lead by adopting a different belief: if it is business, it is personal.

Three basic psychological needs lie at the heart of every human being's ability to thrive: autonomy, relatedness, and competence.

The nature of human motivation is not in making money. It is in making meaning.

**Challenge the Second Eroding Belief:  
The purpose of business is to *make money (a profit)*.**

Think about how your decisions and actions would be different with the following belief: the purpose of business is to serve.

It's true that an organization—even a nonprofit—must make a profit to sustain itself. But to conclude that profit is therefore the purpose of business is an illogical leap. You need air to live, plus water and food. But the purpose of your life is not to breathe, eat, and drink. Your purpose is richer and more profound than basic survival.

To paraphrase Ken Blanchard, profit is the applause you get from creating an optimally motivating environment for your people so they want to take care of your customers.

The nature of human motivation is not in making money. It is in making meaning.

Challenge the belief that the purpose of business is to make money and consider an optimal motivation belief: The purpose of business is to serve—both your people and your customers. Profit is a byproduct of doing both of these well.

**Challenge the Third Eroding Belief:  
Leaders are in a position of *power*.**

“Managers need to be incredibly mindful and clear about the types of power they have and use. Most leaders will be surprised by the potentially negative emotional impact that results from having and using their power, in almost all its forms.” These are the words of Dr. Drea Zigarmi, who found himself surprised by the strength of his own research on how a leader's power affects people's motivational outlooks.

Your power demands that people exert more energy self-regulating to experience autonomy, relatedness, and competence. As Zigarmi puts it, “Power is very precious stuff. It entices the leader into flights of self-delusion and separateness from those they lead.”

Challenge the belief that leaders are in a position of power. Consider the difference with this optimal motivation belief: Leaders are in a position of empowering others.

**Challenge the Fourth Eroding Belief:  
The only thing that really matters is *results*.**

The evidence is clear: people can achieve the results you want, even if their psychological needs are thwarted in the process. But their negative energy and lack of well-being makes it rare for them to sustain or repeat those results—let alone exceed them.

You can help people shift to a more optimal motivational outlook by clarifying the underlying values behind your dashboard metrics. Frame the desired results differently and trust individuals will still achieve necessary metrics.

A focus on results may yield short-term gains. However, those gains are compromised when people feel pressure instead of autonomy, disconnection instead of relatedness, and exploitation with no sense of the competence they have gained.

Reframe the belief that the only thing that matters is results. Consider this optimal motivation belief instead: in the end, what matters is not just the results people achieve, but why and how people achieve them.

**Challenge the Fifth Eroding Belief:  
If you cannot measure it, it *doesn't* matter.**

As in life, the most rewarding aspects of work are the things most difficult to measure. If you believe the statement, *If you cannot measure it, it doesn't matter*, ask yourself why. Is it outside your comfort zone to deal with the emotional nature of things not easily measured? Is it because you believe your job is to control things, and it is difficult to control something not easily measured?

Challenge the belief that if you cannot measure it, it is not important. Put this optimal motivation belief into practice instead: if you cannot measure it, it is probably really important.

**Challenging Motivation Beliefs, Perceptions, and Outdated Practices**

At the end of the day, your leadership beliefs will either promote or undermine people's opportunity to flourish in the workplace. Is your focus on what you want *from* people or what you want *for* people? If you are a people-centered leader whose focus is on what you want *for* people, you will get the results you want *from* people.

# People-Centered Leadership in a Virtual Environment

by **Carmela Southers**

It's a universal truth: we judge ourselves by our intentions and others judge us by our actions. For virtual leaders, the impact of this perceptual disconnect is multiplied because most of our actions are invisible to those we lead.

Virtual team members experience your emails, texts, written reports, conference calls, the occasional one-on-one call, and, if they are lucky, an occasional face-to-face meeting. What does your communication reveal?

Review the last fifteen emails you have written. Would you describe them as people-centered? Or are they reactive—requesting immediate responses, monitoring work, or providing answers without diagnosing the development needs behind the question?

What was the nature of your last few conference calls or video conferences? Did they engage the hearts and minds of attendees, or do you suspect that one or two people showed off their expertise while everyone else caught up on their email?

We all intend to be people-centered leaders. Here's how to make that intention visible in the world of virtual leadership.

- Make people-centered leadership your top priority
- Be accessible
- Respect brain time
- Show personal interest
- Respect differences
- Ask for feedback—and act on it
- Take control of your technology, time, and energy

## **Make People-Centered Leadership Your Top Priority**

Most leaders have deliverables and project responsibilities beyond leadership. Without employees at your door asking for attention, it's easy to focus on your own priorities first and your people second. Whether or not you are aware of it, your team can sense when they are not your first priority. You can accomplish great results on your own, but it's important to remember that the value you add is multiplied when you focus on leading your team toward success.

Focusing on others makes them feel important and fosters inspiration and challenge. Inspired and challenged employees take the initiative and often suggest process improvements to make work easier and provide better results. They also take the lead on their own projects and tasks. As your team becomes more competent and committed, they help you achieve your results.

“The true test of a leader is what happens when you are not there.”

—*Ken Blanchard*

“... and for virtual leaders, that's all the time!”

—*Carmela Southers*

## Be Accessible

Between phone, email, text, instant message, video chat, and whatever technology comes up with next, do your team members know the best way to reach you? Choose just two ways to be accessible to your people—one for urgent matters and one for non-urgent matters—and stick with them. The goal is not to limit the variety or effectiveness of communication between you and your team; in fact, it is to optimize access so that you can be a responsive leader.

- **Urgent accessibility:** Choose one method for people to use when they need to reach you immediately. If you sit at a desk, IM might be best. If you are on the go, perhaps a text message or phone call would work better. Whatever you choose, emphasize to team members that this method is to be used only for urgent issues—and that you will always respond immediately. Establish team agreements that align everyone on the few critical situations that demand instant response.
- **Non-urgent accessibility:** Your staff needs to know you will be there to provide whatever mix of direction and support they need. Choose a different method for regular, non-urgent communications and discipline yourself to respond quickly and thoughtfully to these messages. For example, an email may alert you to a voicemail, online report, or post. Your response may be to set up a phone call to discuss the issue further.

## Respect Brain Time

Because virtual leaders aren't often face to face—or even in close proximity—with their direct reports, some require frequent progress reports to ensure work is being done. When constant activity reporting combines with an always-on, instant-access culture, the likely outcome is overloaded team members working at a frenetic pace. Exhausted from operating reactively and documenting every detail, these knowledge workers have no time left to reflect, innovate, or collaborate thoughtfully to solve problems.

Build the expectation in your team that constructive quiet time is not only allowed but also honored, for individuals as well as groups. Establish norms that clarify purpose and parameters. Brain time should:

- Be writing, planning, or project focused
- Be limited in duration
- Not be used as a way to avoid others
- Include a backup strategy to handle urgent issues
- Be planned and respected

## Show Personal Interest

As a leader, you know that understanding your people, their motivations, and their career and personal goals is critical to building trust, inspiring loyalty, and providing appropriate direction and support when needed. Trust is built on visible demonstrations of care.

Build the expectation in your team that constructive quiet time is not only allowed but also honored.

Be deliberate also about getting to know each person on your team. Learn about each member's culture and be open to differences in values, attitudes, and viewpoints.

So how do you show people on your team that you care without the casual connection that happens naturally when people work face to face? In one on ones as well as team meetings, great virtual leaders encourage transparency and personal relationships. They also freely share information about themselves.

Whether you share vacation photos in meetings, ask about family and hobbies in one-on-one conferences, send thank-you gift cards at the end of a project, or conduct virtual team-building activities, people-centered leadership means deliberately making time and space to build relationships in ways that are meaningful to your people—even if you are thousands of miles apart.

### **Respect Differences in Time Zones, Ethnicity, Culture, and Points of View**

It's tempting to always hold meetings at times that are convenient for the majority of team members. But, in consideration of people who live in various time zones around the globe, why not rotate the times of your virtual meetings? Doing so demonstrates visible respect for everyone's contribution. This way, no one person or group is repeatedly inconvenienced by having to meet at odd hours.

Be deliberate also about getting to know each person on your team. Learn about each member's culture and be open to differences in values, attitudes, and viewpoints. An engineer and sales person from the same culture may be more diverse in how they approach a problem to be solved than are two individuals with different nationalities who do the same job.

### **Ask for Feedback and Act on It**

Can you identify an action you believe your leader could take to be more effective that you haven't shared with him or her? Of course! Giving constructive but unsolicited feedback to a leader feels so risky most never attempt it.

As a virtual leader, you can't observe visual clues such as body language or eye contact shifts that might signal discomfort, misunderstanding, or ineffective communication. Leaders of virtual teams must admit that we usually have no idea how our messages are being received by our team members.

Complicating this issue is that the symptoms of lack of trust and low engagement levels aren't obvious in a virtual workplace. These symptoms include withdrawal, doing the minimum amount of work required, and discounting the contributions of others.

A lack of awareness combined with invisible symptoms means virtual leaders may be blind to escalating team problems. To be effective, we must put our egos aside and solicit honest feedback from team members. These three questions can work wonders if you ask them regularly and act on them cheerfully:

- What do I do that helps you?
- What do I do that gets in your way?
- What could I do to help you be more successful?

If you don't get feedback the first time you ask, repeat the questions regularly. And when the gift of feedback comes, accept it graciously and use it to strengthen and benefit your relationship with your team members. They will appreciate your efforts.

## Take Control of Your Technology, Time, and Energy

It doesn't matter whether as a virtual leader you love or hate technology—or even have both feelings simultaneously. Choose a couple of types of technology and master them.

- Manage your email carefully so that you are not overwhelmed and you don't overwhelm others. The book *The Hamster Revolution* by Mike Song, Vicki Halsey, and Tim Burrell (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2008) has great tips for conquering email overload.
- Control your calendar so that you have time to dedicate to people-centered leadership and serious brain work.
- Figure out what type of communication works best for you and your team.
- Choose a virtual meeting platform and become competent with it. Use it to encourage participation through polls and chats and to capture brainstormed ideas. Make sure everyone knows how to share their screen to learn best practices from their teammates.

Remember, technology is not the master—it's the servant. Don't let it rule you. Answering emails while eating is bad for your digestion, weight, and energy. And sleeping with your cell phone is not good leadership—it's obsession.

People-centered leadership starts with taking care of yourself. As they say before a flight, "Put on your own oxygen mask first, then help others with theirs." Be kind to yourself. Pay attention to what exhausts you and what energizes you to better manage your health, energy, spirit, and mood.

Being a people-centered leader in a virtual environment is a challenge. So go beyond good intentions—take action to show your team members they are your top priority. Follow these guidelines to demonstrate what is most important: people.

People who take better care of themselves are able to think more strategically and make better decisions.

# The Neuroscientific Argument for People-Centered Leadership

by **Madeleine Homan Blanchard**

Advances in the study of the brain are furiously piling up—as are the implications for managing an optimal workplace environment. It turns out that the concepts Ken Blanchard has been talking about for the past 37 years—such as catching people doing things right, using the right leadership style for each employee’s development level on a task, and holding regular one on one meetings—aren’t just nice-to-haves or good management practices. They work. And it’s because of the way our brains are wired.

The body of work in social neuroscience is massive, but these two fundamental concepts have specific implications for the workplace:

1. The part of the brain we need the most at work gets really tired, which affects creativity, problem solving, and the ability to behave ourselves.
2. Our brains are literally hardwired for social connection—the more we feel included by our work group and connected to our peers and leaders, the more productive we will be.

People who take better care of themselves are able to think more strategically and make better decisions. Leaders who are more coach-like demonstrate behaviors—listening carefully, empathizing, supporting others in finding answers to problems—that require enormous self-control. Exceptional self-care is required to perform at this high level—and research supports that it’s worth the effort.

## **The Most Important Part of Our Brains Tires Easily**

Decision fatigue is real and we need to be aware of it. The brain is roughly 2 percent of body weight, yet it consumes 25 percent of our oxygen and 70 percent of our glucose. The part of the brain where the really important functioning—executive functioning—happens is called the prefrontal cortex (PFC) and it is the most recent to evolve. The PFC’s job is to:

- Inhibit inappropriate behaviors, thoughts, and shows of emotion
- Inhibit interference from external and internal distractions
- Be conceptual rather than concrete
- Self-regulate and organize behavior toward long-term goals
- Encode (pay attention to events to remember) and retrieve appropriate memories from long-term storage for use in current thought processes
- Make good decisions, have insights, and choose good judgment
- Organize and plan for the future and delay gratification
- Multitask and sort through high levels of information, switching attention and goals as necessary
- Understand what others are thinking and decode their intentions and motivations
- Monitor errors, knowing what is real versus what is imagined/remembered

Our brain is what neuroscientists call a resource hog. It's as if we fill up our gas tank with sleep, rest, and glucose, but every choice, every inhibition, and every decision uses up gas in our tank. And here is the most important point: when our PFC runs out of gas, we don't know it. Think of it this way: when we go to the gym and do a bicep workout, we feel our muscles give out when they are exhausted. When our car is low on gas, we see the fuel gauge go down or the warning light go on. But when our PFC is worn out, there's no indication—until we behave in a way that we hadn't planned.

For example, let's say you get up in the morning and decide what to wear, what to have for breakfast, how to arrange for your kid's after-school event which requires a different routine, and which route to take to work so you can stop for gas. At work, you wisely choose not to have a donut at a staff meeting or tell an inappropriate joke in front of the CFO. The day wears on and you have to be nice to cranky customers, deal with a broken printer, watch your language when a vendor is rude, edit out the snarky comments in an email, and make a cup of tea in the break room where someone has left a double chocolate cake. If you are a manager, you must listen to and empathize with your people all day long. You must choose the leadership styles that will best serve their development needs. When nobody else has the answer to a problem, you must provide one, even if you don't have enough information. Perhaps you skip lunch and then get called into a late meeting to revise a long-term strategy due to a big shift in world events.

By the time you get home, the only thing you want to do is rip open a bag of sour cream and onion chips—despite your intentions to stick with green leafy vegetables and quinoa—because your self-control is simply used up. And then you berate yourself for not having willpower. You shouldn't. If it feels exhausting, it's because it is—your PFC has given out.

What does this mean in terms of how to manage ourselves at work? Here are a few tips:

- Everything we know about overall health is doubly true for brain care. Sleep is not optional. Everyone has to find their own ideal amount, but powering through without enough sleep will eventually make it harder to stay on an even keel.
- Eat right and often. This isn't just true for weight control, it's true for being able to think straight through your workday. Don't skip lunch—ever.
- Do the hard stuff first. Planning, creative problem solving, brainstorming, and making decisions all use up critical PFC resources. Even if you keep your hydration and glucose steady, as the day goes on your PFC isn't as fresh as it is first thing in the morning.
- Plan for tomorrow, tonight. Use up the last of your PFC's resources on the small decisions—like what you will wear and have for breakfast—before you go to bed so you don't have to fatigue your PFC in the morning. The more routine you create to deal with recurring basics, the fresher you will be when you get to work.
- Know when not to make a decision or get into an emotionally loaded conversation. The only indication you may have that your PFC is done in might be a slightly heightened perception of light and sound, and possibly emotional sensitivity. You just don't know what will be the final straw—and you don't want to risk reacting in a way you will regret. For example, if you have a meeting with a difficult person at 4:00 p.m., try to move it.

If you are a manager, you must listen to and empathize with your people all day long.

Positive social interaction and the perception of fairness among peers activates the reward system in the brain.

- Take breaks, and make your people take breaks. Research shows that exercise makes us smarter and more creative, so if you can do a walking meeting instead of a sit-down, try it.

### **The Social Brain**

We are absolutely hardwired to make friends, create nurturing relationships, and be part of a group. Social connection and inclusion are critical to every aspect of health. It isn't just a nice-to-have—it's a have-to-have.

With new imaging techniques, neuroscientists can now see what happens in the brain. When we have physical pain, certain areas of brain are clearly activated. When we experience social pain—specifically rejection or social humiliation—the areas that are activated overlap. It's now believed that the same brain systems that are activated by physical pain are activated by social pain. Emotional pain is real and debilitating, even though we can't feel it the way we feel sensory pain. It affects neurochemicals and prevents the PFC from operating at full capacity. The old nursery rhyme “sticks and stones may break my bones but words can never hurt me” is simply not true. Words hurt just as much as a physical injury—in fact, more. Memory of physical pain can fade over time, but memory of emotional pain often remains starkly fresh. On the flip side, there is evidence that positive social interaction and the perception of fairness among peers activates the reward system in the brain, which keeps it humming smoothly.

What does this mean for the workplace?

- You aren't being a drama queen if you feel terrible when you're left out. Your brain is designed to react that way.
- Taking time to ensure everyone involved in a project feels included is critically important to a brain-friendly atmosphere. It isn't just about being nice. It's good business.
- Having regular one on ones increases relatedness and a sense of connectedness with each employee. Again—brain friendly.
- Genuine positive feedback and regular affirmative reinforcement has the same effect on the brain as a gift of chocolate or money: it activates the reward system in the brain and allows the PFC to operate at full capacity.

It takes enormous neurological resources to show up at work, on time, properly dressed, with an organized agenda to think creatively, visualize the future, solve complex problems, and generally get along all day. Leaders who understand this will be more effective—and also more willing to go the extra mile to create a brain-friendly environment in which their people will thrive.

# People-Centered Leadership as the Key to Success

by **Scott Blanchard**

The Ken Blanchard Companies makes the case for people-centered leadership based on the fundamental premise that senior leaders in organizations will get better results, more profits, and more long-term success if they lead their people using leadership practices that put people first.

When my father, Ken Blanchard, and his associates founded our company 37 years ago, their mission was to make a difference in the lives of managers, employees, and organizations they served. They accomplished this by embracing some fairly radical ideas for the time, such as these:

- Power and control are not necessary to run a healthy and profitable organization.
- Leaders can become more effective if they learn to be flexible in their leadership style.
- Successful leaders believe their job is not to control but to free their employees to use their heads and hearts at work.

Decades later, the ideas that formed the foundation of our company as well as the larger leadership development industry are no longer revolutionary thoughts promoted by a few radical thought leaders. They have become proven tenets and practices for the most successful companies in the world. In my role as consultant, I have had the pleasure and honor of working with many of these highly admired firms.

When speaking to the senior executives of these industry-leading organizations, I always ask, “What is the key to your company’s success? Why are you at the top of your industry?” Interestingly, every time I ask these questions I get a similar response: “It is our people who have created our success. Our people are the best in the world. And since they are so important to our success, we not only treat them well but also invest in them, challenge them, and give them chances to grow, develop, and to be more and do more than they ever thought they could.” In short, the leaders of the best companies get it: people come first, second, and third.

In contrast, when I have worked with leaders of firms that are not at the top of their industry and, in fact, may be struggling to achieve financial success, I ask these questions: “What is the reason your firm is failing to lead your industry? What does the leading firm in your industry do or have that your firm does not? Why are they more successful?” These leaders often respond that their lack of success is attributed to some sort of strategic failure or disadvantage the firm cannot overcome. “Our competitor got a head start on us with their winning product.” “They beat us to the punch.” “They are better at executing their plans.” And so on. What I do not hear is what I believe to be the true reason for the difference between their faltering organization and the leaders of their industry: poor or mediocre organizations do not invest in, or practice, people-centered leadership.

The most successful firms have a clear and compelling vision for their company, products, and services that not only clearly states what they do, but also why it matters to the world.

Leaders of the most successful firms in the world have an advantage because they employ a disciplined approach of people-centered leadership. These leaders possess a clear and compelling vision for their company and its products and services that clearly states what they do and why it matters to the world. This kind of vision compels people—employees, managers, customers, and shareholders—to get involved.

Leaders of the most successful firms in the world attract and hire the best people they can get and then treat their people as appreciating assets who are worth investing in and retaining.

Leaders of the most successful firms in the world take leadership—from the top of the organization to the front lines—very seriously. Since profit is the applause that results from taking care of employees as well as customers, prepared and effective leaders are essential. It is no surprise that the best organizations spend more money as a percentage of sales on leadership and employee development than do other firms.

Leaders of the most successful firms in the world identify people-centered leadership as the key to their success. I have heard many leaders of these respected organizations say virtually the same thing: “We couldn’t have achieved this level of success if we hadn’t put our people first.”

Research by renowned economist Lauri Bassi has proven that firms who put people first, as measured by the highest scores on the Human Capital Management (HCM) scale, have outperformed the S&P 500 over the past 25 years in periods of financial prosperity as well as in more difficult times. Most notably, firms with higher HCM scores are able to endure and recover more quickly from cyclical downturns in the economy than are firms with lower HCM scores.

Simply stated, leaders of the best and most successful firms understand that all they have and all they hope for is due to their people—and as a result, they practice people-centered leadership.

## About the Authors and Blanchard Experts

**Ken Blanchard**—A prominent, sought-after author, speaker, and business consultant, Dr. Blanchard is universally characterized by his friends, colleagues, and clients as one of the most insightful, powerful, and compassionate individuals in business today. An influential leadership expert, he is respected for his years of ground breaking work in the fields of leadership and management.

**Michael Lurie**—Integrated Solutions Practice Leader, Michael brings together the full spectrum of our global expertise and our most senior and experienced consulting professionals to partner with clients in cocreating leadership development that aligns with their business strategy.

**Cathy Huett**—Senior Director, Global Development for The Ken Blanchard Companies, Cathy leads and supports trainers, consultants, and speakers around the world who deliver Blanchard’s positive leadership message.

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**Susan Fowler**—Consultant, trainer, and best-selling author, Susan is widely known as one of the foremost experts on personal empowerment and motivation. She is the coauthor of more than seven books, including *Situational Self Leadership and the One Minute Manager* and the author of *Why Motivating People Doesn’t Work...and What Does*.

**Carmela Southers**—Senior Consulting Partner and the coauthor of the Blanchard Teaming Virtually and Leading Virtually programs, Carmela is a sought-after speaker and consultant on increasing organizational, team, and leader effectiveness in the virtual world.

**Madeleine Homan Blanchard**—Master Certified Coach, author, and speaker, Madeleine has been a coach since 1989 and is a cofounder of Blanchard Coaching Services. She is also an expert in the field of neuroscience and a pioneer in the field of coaching.

**Scott Blanchard**—Principal and Executive Vice President and coauthor of *Leverage Your Best, Ditch the Rest* and *Leading at a Higher Level*, Scott represents the next generation of pioneering thought leadership on management issues.

## About The Ken Blanchard Companies\*

The Ken Blanchard Companies® is one of the world's leading training and development experts. We create lasting behavioral change that has measurable impact on the organizations we work with. We provide training that makes a difference.

Our programs are based on behavioral models that add a situational context to the training experience, so individuals learn to be more productive in real-world scenarios and make the shift from learning to doing more quickly and effectively.

As the innovator of the most widely used leadership development system in the world, Situational Leadership® II, we provide groundbreaking thinking and a memorable learner experience. We begin with a collaborative diagnostic process identifying your unique needs and business issues, then develop an appropriate leadership strategy.

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