

# Disrupt Yourself Podcast

## EPISODE 278: KEN BLANCHARD

Welcome back to the Disrupt Yourself podcast, where we provide strategies and advice on how to climb the S Curve of learning in your professional and personal life, disrupting who you are now to slingshot into who you want to be. I'm your host, Whitney Johnson. Before we dive in, I just want to thank you so much for leaving reviews on the podcast. It is so valuable to our mission. Here's one from Olivia Baker. "Five Stars a feed favorite. Disrupt Yourself is a favorite in my feed. I'm consistently impressed by the engaging conversations, insightful content, and actionable ideas. Not to mention, Whitney is consistently giving us a masterclass on what it means to be a fantastic interviewer. My sincere thanks to Whitney and her podcast team for putting this fabulous show out into the world." Thank you for listening, Olivia. We know there's so much out there that can go into your listening and reading feeds, so we're really proud to be a highlight. This week, I got to talk with Ken Blanchard, one of the most revered thinkers and writers on business leadership and management philosophy. He's authored more than 60 books, consults with Fortune 500 companies, and speaks around the world. You probably know him from his 1982 book, *The One Minute Manager*, which has sold more than 15 million copies. Ken has no intention of slowing down despite turning 83 years old this year. If you're craving a dose of inspiration, you've come to the right episode. Here's my conversation with Ken.

**Whitney Johnson:** I have admired you from afar for a while, and I think that there are so many experiences that you've had throughout your life that have made you who you are. And so, I would like to wind back the clock a bit and have you share with us a formative experience.

**Ken Blanchard:** Well, Whitney, I had two amazing parents. My father retired as a rear admiral in the Navy, was a war hero and pretty amazing human being. And I'll never forget when I won the president of the seventh grade in junior high school in New Rochelle, New York, I came home all pumped up and my father said, well, Ken, now your president, your leadership training begins. He said, now that you're president, don't ever use your position. He said, great leaders are great because people respect and trust them, not because they have power, he said. It's a myth

in the military. It's my way or the highway. He said, Sure, in battle somebody's got to call the shots. But if you act like a really big deal over your men, they will shoot you before the enemy. And so, he was a tremendous mentor for me around leadership. And then my mother was an amazing, she was a positive thinker before Norman Vincent Peale started thinking about it. And she told me when I was young, she said, Now, Ken, don't you think you're better than anybody else, but don't let anybody else think they're better than you. God didn't make any junk. There's a pearl of goodness in everybody, dig for it. So, I've been a digger all my life, looking for the good in people. And you really will find it, that's for sure. And so and looking for how I can influence people without using power.

**Whitney Johnson:** What about a crucible experience, something probably in your adult life that has really, it tested you?

**Ken Blanchard:** Well, it's interesting. When I wanted to be a dean of students, you know, I, when I was an undergrad, I was a dorm counselor and all that kind of thing. So, when I was getting my doctor's degree and all the professors said, good that you're going to be a dean because you couldn't be a professor because you can't write. And so, I always had this belief from them that I couldn't write. But my first job is I was assistant to the dean of the College of Business at Ohio University. And when I got there, Harry Everts, the dean, said, Ken, I want you to teach a course. He said I want all my deans to teach. And I had never thought about teaching because if you don't publish, you perish, you know? And he said, I don't care about that. He said, I want you to teach. And so, Paul Hersey had just arrived as chairman of the department. He put me in the management department, teaching a management course, which was fine for me because I did my doctoral dissertation testing Fred Fiedler's model. He was the first situational leadership theorist. And so, after a few weeks, I came home and told my wife, Margie, I said, God, this teaching is really fun. This is what I ought to be doing. She said, What about the writing? I said, I don't know. We'll figure something out. But I heard that Paul Hersey taught a really good course. So, in December 1966, I came up to him. I said, Paul, could I sit in your class next semester? He said, nobody audits my class if you want to take it for credit, you're welcome. And he walked away.

**Ken Blanchard:** And I thought that was interesting because I had a Ph.D., and he didn't. And so, I came home, and I told Margie and she said, well, is he any good? I said He's supposed to be great. She said, well, get your ego out of the way and take his damn course, you know. So, I had to talk the registrar into letting me in, but I took the course and wrote all the papers. And in June of '67, Hersey comes into my office, he said, Ken, he said, I've been teaching leadership for ten years. I think I'm better than anybody, and they want me to write a textbook. But, you know, writing isn't really my great strength area. And he said I've been looking for a good writer like you to potentially be a coauthor. Would you do that? And I said, we ought to be an interesting team. You can't write and I'm not supposed to, so let's do it. So, we wrote a textbook called *Management of Organizational Behavior Utilizing Human Resources*. And it's I think it's in its 10th edition now. It sells more today than it did back then. And so, I went to the dean, and I said, I quit as an administrator. I got a book coming out, I'm going to be a faculty member. And he said you can't quit. I said, why not? He said Because I was going to fire you. I said, really? He says, Yeah, because you're a lousy administrator, which I am. That's why I'm the chief spiritual officer of our company. I'm a cheerleader. And when we started our company, Margie, who has a Ph.D. in Communications, she obviously should have been president, which she was.

**Whitney Johnson:** All right. There is a lot to unpack there. I want to go back to the writing. So, you have a boss tell you that you can't write, but then you take a class from Paul Hersey, and he concludes that you can write. Do you remember the shift that needed to take place in your brain to say, oh, actually I can write?

**Ken Blanchard:** I just thought, well, if he thinks I could write, why not? Maybe I can. I found out later that my writing was a little too much down to earth for the normal faculty member. You know, I remember one, one course they asked me to come up with an analogy in a paper, and I said that went over like a pregnant high jumper. And the professor said, please, let's not be facetious. So, I had to look up what facetious meant.

**Whitney Johnson:** So, it wasn't that you couldn't write, it's just that you weren't writing in the style that they wanted you to write?

**Ken Blanchard:** I think so. You know, and so, the beginning of my mission statement is I want to be a loving teacher, an example of simple truths. And so, that's what I really was trying to do, is what, what simple truths could we help people with?

**Whitney Johnson:** We're going to get to simple truths in just a minute. I do want to pick up on one other thing, though, that you said, which was you thought about taking Paul Hersey's class. You got a Ph.D. He didn't. And then your wife was a truth-teller and said, you need to get over your ego.

**Ken Blanchard:** Yeah.

**Whitney Johnson:** That was interesting.

**Ken Blanchard:** Yeah. Well, we're going to be married 60 years next this June. And she's been just an amazing partner in my, my life, you know, because we, we have a tremendous give and take relationship and we don't argue or yell at each other. We just, it's just been, been great. We're going back for her 60th college reunion. And whenever we go back to these reunions, all these guys always come up and say, how did you talk Margie into marrying you? She's tremendous.

**Whitney Johnson:** All right. So, let's talk about some of the simple truths. You have just written. Another book, *Simple Truths of Leadership*, that you co-authored with Randy Conley. And you share 52 ways to be a servant leader. There are a few that caught my attention. And so, what I'd like to do is in a somewhat rapid-fire, tell you this one caught my attention. And have you riff on it for just a minute.

**Ken Blanchard:** So, just one comment. It's 52 ways to be a servant leader and build trust because Randy is an expert on trust. That's why he's, my coauthor. And so, we have 26 on servant leadership and 26 on trust.

**Whitney Johnson:** Spoken like a good coauthor. So, thank you for, for catching that. I appreciate it. Okay. So, number one, it's actually number five in the book. The key to developing people is to catch them doing something right.

**Ken Blanchard:** It's interesting, Whitney, some people have said to me, Ken, if we took everything away, you've taught over the years, but one thing, what would you hold on to? And I always say the second secret of the one-minute manager, the key to developing people is to catch them doing something right. Because I think so often when people see their boss coming, they think that they're in trouble rather than wandering around to see if he can catch people doing things right and cheer him on. And, and all so, I just think it's such a powerful thing because I think people love to be noticed, particularly in a positive way.

**Whitney Johnson:** Can you think of someone who caught you doing something right that really meant something to you?

**Ken Blanchard:** So, I think about it, you know. I mentioned Margie. She always catches me doing things right. And she was saying to a group the other day, I've always been amazed at Ken. He takes complex stuff and seems to find a way to make it simple. And I just appreciated that because that's, that's been a goal of mine. And so, I think, you know, the have a long-term relationship with somebody. You need to catch each other doing things right.

**Whitney Johnson:** Okay. Let's go to the next one. You said when people are off track, don't reprimand them, redirect them.

**Ken Blanchard:** Yes. And that's the third secret of *The One Minute Manager*. Because when you're wandering around, sure, you want to praise progress, but if somebody is not doing as well as you had agreed to do with them, you need to get them back on track. And we initially call the third secret the one-minute reprimand, but we rewrote *The One Minute Manager* to be *The New One Minute Manager* a number of years ago. Because the young people today really don't like top-down leadership. They really believe in side-by-side leadership. And so, we said, well, made it one-minute redirects. And so, you go to somebody, do you say Joe or Whitney? I notice in this area the performance isn't as good as we hoped it would be. Do you agree? And they'll always agree and all. What could I do

to help you get back on track? Which is redirection. So, you're there for people both to catch them doing things right, but to also help them get back on track when, when they're not.

**Whitney Johnson:** And I love that question that you asked of it's not quite where we had hoped it would be. Do you agree? And how you said it sounds like 100% of the time people say, I do agree. And so, you're allowing them to take ownership of that. Is that the psychology behind it for you?

**Ken Blanchard:** Yes. You know, and it's a whole different thing because, you know, one of the most common leadership styles around the world is what I call seagull management, you know?

**Whitney Johnson:** No, I don't. Why don't you tell us?

**Ken Blanchard:** You're given an assignment by someone, and they leave you alone until this is a problem or it's not progress. And then they fly in, make a lot of noise, dump on everybody and fly out, you know? And so, a lot of people have experienced seagull management. But when you come in and say, I notice that this isn't as good as we had hoped, what do you think? You know, it's a very different approach than, you know, I just saw this, you know, and finger-pointing and all that kind of thing. Because you want to know, the key thing about being a great leader is it's we, it's we, not me. And you're working for them. They're not working for you.

**Whitney Johnson:** Number three, which leads nicely into because you said you're working for them. Effective servant leaders realize they have to use different strokes for different folks, or, in my words, meet them where they are.

**Ken Blanchard:** Yeah, that gets to one of the original concepts that Paul Hersey and I developed called Situational Leadership. We, we call our version of it SL2. And it really says that what you ought to do with your people in the beginning of the year is sit down first and set goals. You know, the first secret of *The One Minute Manager* is, is one-minute goal setting. All good performance starts with clear goals. And once you set the goals, then you ought to sit with them and together analyze what's their development level, and that particular goal. And development level is a function of what is their competence, and their ability to do it already. And then, what is their commitment or motivation? We find that there's four levels of development. There's the enthusiastic beginner who's all excited about a task but has never done it before. So, they need a directive leadership style. You get somebody who's kind of a disillusioned learner. They've been working on something and it's harder than they thought, and so, they need a coaching style. Then you get somebody who's capable but cautious. They've got skills, but they don't want to be left alone. They still need encouragement. So, you give them a supporting leadership style and then finally you get the self-directed achiever who's got both competence and commitment and you can delegate to them. So, it's really important to know it's not only different strokes for different folks, it's different strokes for the same folks on different parts of their job because they could have four or five different responsibilities and they could be, you know, a peak performer on one and enthusiastic beginner on the other. And you have to use different strokes for, for different parts of their job.

**Whitney Johnson:** Okay, two more. Create autonomy through boundaries. That one really hit me. I love that one.

**Ken Blanchard:** You know, I talk a lot about servant leadership, and they think that's about the inmates running the prison or trying to please everybody. But there's two aspects of servant leadership. One is, is vision, direction, values, and goals, which is the leadership part of servant leadership. Because leadership is about going somewhere. And those are really the boundaries. You know, this is what we're trying to accomplish and all. And then once that's clear, now you turn the pyramid upside down and you work for them. And this is the servant-leadership part. Your job is to help them live according to the vision and accomplish the goals. Boundaries are really important. We have a favorite saying that Alan Randolph and I used in a book we wrote on autonomy and all, which was "A river without banks, is a large puddle." And if you look at Washington now, we have a large puddle there because we don't agree on vision anymore. We don't even have the same values. I used to think that freedom of speech was a value, but if you disagree with some group, they don't say let's talk. They surround your business and try to put you out of business. And so, I got a chance to talk to a bunch of the congressmen a year or two ago, and I said, you know, they were all the faith-based guys. And I said, you know, the Bible, what does it say in the Bible happens to people

without vision. And they all shouted they perish. They, they're out of control. And so, it's really important. The banks are the vision, values, direction, and goals.

**Whitney Johnson:** All right. Love is the answer. What is the question?

**Ken Blanchard:** That kind of came from my mother, really? You know, she always said that. But to me, servant leadership is love in action, you know, because you're out there trying to help people win. And love is not in this gushy kind of thing. It's, it's respect. It's being on their side, wanting to help them win. You know, you love them enough to help them be the very best that they are. So, love is the answer. What's the question? And I think it's really key.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. You love them. You love them, but you don't, you love them enough to not want them to stay where they are. You want them to keep making progress. People oftentimes ask me, I worked with Clayton Christensen very closely for the better part of a decade and people would frequently ask me, well, what did you learn from him? He's a brilliant man. What did you learn? And for me, one of the most important things that I learned is that he did not separate the secular from the spiritual for him. You know, he would bring his faith to work, and he would bring his work to his faith and didn't compartmentalize his life. And so, one of the questions that I thought about for you is you talk about intertwining your work and your faith. Is this something you've always done or was there a point at your life, in your life where you said you made that decision to make sure that the two are blended?

**Ken Blanchard:** Well, it's really interesting. Margie and I kind of turned our backs on our faith when our kids were young. We saw a lot of hypocrisy in churches and didn't think much more about my faith until *The One Minute Manager* came out and I was invited on the *Hour of Power* by Robert Schuller in his heyday. And he said, Ken, I love *The One Minute Manager*. But, you know, who's the greatest one-minute manager of all time. I said, Who's that? He said, Jesus. I said, really? He said, Yeah, he was really clear on goals. Is that your first secret, one-minute goals? I said, yeah. He said you and Tom Peters didn't invent management by wandering around. Jesus did. He wandered from one little village to another. If anybody showed any interest, he'd praise him, heal them. Isn't that your second secret one? Yeah. And if people stepped out of line, he wasn't afraid to give them a one-minute reprimand. He threw the moneylenders out of the temple. Isn't that your third secret? Yeah. And so, I got really fascinated, and I started to read the Gospels, and I laughed because everything I had ever taught about leadership, Jesus did with these 12 incompetent guys He hired. And so that's when Phil Hodges and I started a ministry called Lead Like Jesus, which is right around 1999, 2000.

**Ken Blanchard:** And it's all over the world now. But we don't push a religion because I don't think Jesus came here to start a religion. I think he came here to build a relationship. And the biggest enemies of Christianity are Christians because we're out there judging. And I say there's two things you need to remember about Jesus. He said, "You'll be known as my disciples by how you love each other." And then he said, "Judge not, or you shall be judged." And I don't know where we forget, forget that. So, so I've brought that philosophy into my whole life. But what I don't do in our regular business is I don't proselytize. You know, I say to people that I believe in demonstration, not proclamation. And so, we've had a number of people who have really looked at their, their faith and their spirituality because they've watched how Margie and I behave. Not what we say, but what we do. And I think that if you have a solid faith and you believe is, love is the answer. What's the question? Then you ought to model that. And then people will say to you, where does that come from? Then you can share with them. But I don't think people like to be preached at.

**Whitney Johnson:** Just like we. We all want to change, but we don't want people to tell us to change. It's the same thing. So, that's interesting. So, you had a period of time where you weren't very connected to your faith, but then you had that pivotal game-changing conversation and said, huh, let me revisit this.

**Ken Blanchard:** So, it was kind of a big aha. And it's just been wonderful to, to just see how people respond to a love-based approach to leadership. Because it's again, we get back to the boundaries. It's not they can do anything they want, but you're there to help them live according to the vision, values, and goals which are the boundaries.

**Whitney Johnson:** Right. And, you know, I think about this a lot, Ken, is this idea of if you need to, I will say this to people sometimes and I suspect you do something similar. Is if I'm coaching someone and they'll say, well, I need to do X, Y, or Z to them. And I'll say, you can say pretty much anything you want to say, but they have to know in that moment that you love them, that you wholeheartedly love them. And if you do, then you can say what you need to say, and they'll be able to hear it.

**Ken Blanchard:** Yeah, well, you know, it's interesting. One of the big questions that I get is how do you influence people up the hierarchy? You know, and I remember one of the universities I was at, the dean wrote a lot about participative management, but he didn't engage in it. Faculty would come into his office and tell him how inconsistent he was, and he would throw them out of the office. You know, and I agree with their feedback. But what I have known is that if you want to give people feedback, you better have a relationship with them, because no matter how good your relationship, you're going to have to draw on that to give them feedback. So, I decided I had to get to know him, and I stopped him in the hall, and I said, George, you've done a lot of writing and I'm just getting going in my writing career, would you look at some of the things I've written and give me your feedback? Oh, sure. And I went in his office, and he had flip charts up and all. We had two or three meetings with together. And finally, in the third meeting, he said, Ken, what do you think we should do with all the jerks we have in this school? And the key word is, what do you think we should do? Because now he saw me as part of his team, and I could give him feedback on what we could do with the faculty and also what he could do and all because I had a relationship to draw from. And I think that's so important for people to remember is you need to build relationships with people before you can be very helpful for them.

**Whitney Johnson:** You just said something. I just had something click in my mind. So, you're your coauthor, Randy? It's right. Randy Connelly, right? Yes. He said, "there is an US in trust." And then you just said something that clicked in my brain. Is that when someone uses the word, we, they are indicating to you that they are in a positive relationship with you. It's a key indicator.

**Ken Blanchard:** Yeah, that's right. Yeah. It's a really powerful thing because that's what you want. Is that in working with your people, it's we, not me. And you go to them, you know, like people go to some of my seminars like they go to yours, they say, well, how do I take this back to my people? And I said, you don't go back and say, okay, I went to the seminar, and here's what we're going to do.

**Whitney Johnson:** Right.

**Ken Blanchard:** You go back, and you say, I just was at the seminar and I'd love to share with you some of my learnings. And then let's talk about whether you think any of those concepts might be helpful as we interact with each other. Because now, again, you're saying, we. You want their opinions.

**Whitney Johnson:** Earlier you said that you couldn't write. Which we now know is patently untrue. And in fact, you have written 60 books, many of which are co-authored. Your very first book was a collaboration. What makes a great collaboration for you?

**Ken Blanchard:** Well, I always think my mother used to say, why don't you write a book by yourself? You know, because the 65 books I've written, I've only written basically two by myself, one on golf. So many people helped my golf game, I didn't know who to write it with. And then my spiritual journey. But I really like to work with other people because I'm a learner. So, to me, a good coauthor is somebody I have something to learn from. I don't want to use them. I want to be a partner with them. And so, I've just had wonderful opportunities to write with people I learned from, like Colleen Barrett, who took over the presidency of Southwest after Herb Kelleher stepped down. What an amazing woman, you know. And she, one of my favorite sayings from her is, "people admire your skills, but they love your vulnerability." You know? And if you're willing to admit that you don't have all the answers, then people really are part of the team. And I wrote a book with Truett Cathy, who founded Chick-fil-A, who's not open on Sunday but outperforms all the fast-food places. And Garry Ridge, the president of WD-40, who, has implemented a lot of this stuff. And he and I wrote a book together called *Help People Win at Work*, a business philosophy called *Don't Mark My Paper, Help Me Get An A*, because he heard me in a class because he was in our first master's class at the University of San Diego.

**Ken Blanchard:** Margie and I started a Master of Science in executive leadership that I always gave the final exam out at the beginning of my classes when I was a teacher. The fact that you say, What are you doing? And I'd say, I'm confused. They'll say, actually, I thought, we're supposed to teach these kids. You are, but don't give them the question of the final. And I'd say, not only am I going to give them the questions of the final, what do you think I'm going to do all semester? I'm going to teach them the answers. So, when they get to the final exam, they get A's. Life's about getting A's, not some stupid normal distribution curve. I can't believe organizations where managers still ask to screw a certain percentage of their people. I always say to them, how many of you go out and hire losers? You know, we lost some of our worst people last year. We better hire some new losers to fill in those slots. No, you don't hire losers you hire winners. You steal from other companies, or you hire people who have potential, so why wouldn't you want them to win?

**Whitney Johnson:** One of the things I heard you say is that you, you're a learner. And so, if there's a topic that you want to learn more about, you'll find someone who may know a little bit more about that topic than you or also wants to learn about that. And you go on a journey together.

**Ken Blanchard:** Well, initially, I probably think they know more about it than I do, you know, and go to them, you know. I mean, I was asked one time would I write a book with Norman Vincent Peale, and he was 86 years old at the time. And my parents had gone to his church before I was born. And I said, he's still alive? Yeah. And Norman was really an amazing and so is his wife, Ruth. And I just learned so much from them. And we wrote a book together called *The Power of Ethical Management Integrity Pays*. You don't have to cheat to win. And the next book I'm writing is with my son, who's taking over the presidency of our company. And the working title is *A Leadership Legacy*. And the subtitle, *It's a Family Affair*. And it's about what he's learned from me and what I've learned from him all the years. He's 57 years old, and when he became 55, he kept on saying to Margie, how does it feel like to have a 55-year-old son? Now, his sister just turned 55 about a week ago, so.

**Whitney Johnson:** Oh, yeah, that's funny. What, what a gift to write that book with your son and be able to reflect on what you're both learning from each other. So, your biggest book that has sold, at least on the data that I have, over 15 million copies. You've talked about the gist in the course of our conversation, so, I won't ask you to, to repeat that. But I'm wondering. When that book hit and you kind of hit this, there was this inflection point in your influence. Do you remember if there were one or two things that you were now able to do or get done because your influence had expanded?

**Ken Blanchard:** Well, it's interesting. You know, we were on sabbatical leave in San Diego and we're thinking of going back to university. But I met Spencer Johnson at a cocktail party, and he wrote children's books with his wife. You know, the the value of courage, the story of Jackie Robinson, the value of determination, the story of Helen Keller and Marjorie met him first and hand carried him over. And she said, You two ought to write a children's book for managers. They won't read anything else. And Spencer was writing a one-minute scolding with a psychiatrist about disciplining kids. And I invited him to a seminar I was doing next week in town. And he came and laughed and sat in the back and came running up at the end and said, forget parenting, let's do the one-minute manager. And since he was a children's book writer and I'm a storyteller, we decided to write a parable because there had been no parables in the management leadership field. There was *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, and *The Littlest Prince*, and Og Mandino's, *The Greatest Salesman in the World*. But so, we ended up writing that little parable, and all of a sudden it came out and went, whoa, you know, we said, wow, isn't that interesting? You know. That how people really like to learn through a story. And too many leadership books are too long. You know, this one I've done now, even this 52 ways is.

**Whitney Johnson:** Very brief.

**Ken Blanchard:** A little over 100 pages. You know what? It gave me an opportunity to realize that if there's good concepts and good learning's out there. How can we find a way to teach it using a parable in a fun kind of way? And so, that's been kind of become my trademark, you know, of, of writing, writing stories to tell people about concepts. And I think people really enjoy that.

**Whitney Johnson:** Well, I'm still stuck on the pregnant high jumper. So, you learned at a young age to do that. All right. So, one of your learnings was. Well, there are a couple. Number one is that Margie hand walked him over to

you, so she knew she had an instinct or a hunch that there was something magical in that in that partnership. You learned also that, in fact, let's lean into the storytelling because people really are captivated and learn through stories. Is there anything else that in terms of your. People talk about influence and wanting to be able to have influence because usually it's they want to do good in the world. They want to get more done. They want to make people's lives better. Do you remember if there is something that you were able to say or do as a consequence now that your notoriety had increased? Or maybe I'm not maybe that's not true, maybe it didn't change, but I have to believe that it did at some level. Does anything come to mind?

**Ken Blanchard:** Well, it really was interesting, because, about that time, most people who are speakers and writers have an agent and some people and all. Margie was the one who said, Ken I think we should start our own company. Because for two reasons, she said, One, we need to see if we can practice what we preach, you know. And secondly, this could be a laboratory where we could test and learn things. And so, we have over 250 people around the world in the, in the company. And we're 42 years old and less than 5% of companies that start ever make it to that. And it's really been fun to build our own organization and see if we can practice what we preach and also to test concepts and to be with people in a really significant way. And I, I think that that was something that I hadn't planned, you know, I hadn't thought about, you know, because, you know, most people who decide to go out and write books and do anything are individual contributors and all and don't want to be held back, they think, by an organization. Where I think our company has pushed me and everybody forward rather than backward.

**Whitney Johnson:** That's interesting. So, after you wrote that book, you, and Margie said, maybe we need to start a company to be able to not only evangelize these ideas but to have a laboratory. It's kind of like that decision to have children. And we think we're going to teach our children something, but they end up teaching us far more than we teach them. Sounds like a similar situation.

**Ken Blanchard:** That's right. Yeah.

**Whitney Johnson:** All right. So, you mentioned Garry Ridge a few minutes ago. I know you've been I've spoken to him a number of times. You've been a very important mentor to him. We've had him on our podcast. You've also mentored Marshall Goldsmith. You mentioned Paul Hersey being an important influence on you. Anybody else that was a really important mentor for you?

**Ken Blanchard:** Norman Vincent Peale had a tremendous impact, particularly on our faith. You know, he said to Margie, and I said, The Lord's always had you on his team. You just haven't suited up yet, you know, which is really.

**Whitney Johnson:** That's good.

**Ken Blanchard:** And then another wonderful thing that he said was, "if you stop learning, lie down and let them throw the dirt on you because you're already dead." And here he was at 86 wanting to learn more. And what an example. I'm going to be 83 in June. And I'm thinking, Norman, I'm catching up. But I'm still excited about learning and sharing, and, and all. People have asked me, when are you going to retire? And I said, I'm not. I, I ended up writing a fun book with Mort Shavitz. It's called *Refire Don't Retire*. And I got that concept with Margie and I, a number of years ago were invited to Zig Ziegler's 80th birthday party. And I called Zig on the phone when I was about 65 then, and I said, Ziggy, you're going to retire. He said, There's no mention of it in the Bible. He said, Except for Jesus, Mary, and David, nobody under 80 made an impact. I'm refiring, not retiring. And I thought, God, what a great concept. And so, I, we dedicated the book to Zig because he had passed away by the time, we ended up writing it.

**Whitney Johnson:** I love that. Except for Jesus, Mary and David, no one under 80 made an impact. That's fantastic.

**Ken Blanchard:** Yeah, it is. And what we talk about refining is four areas you need to take a look at in your life. Yeah. What are you doing to refire yourself intellectually? You know, keep your mind active. Second, what are you doing physically? And I have a recumbent bike in our bedroom, and I walk our dog and do stretching and stuff. I have a, have a coach that works with me. Then what are you doing spiritually? And I'm not talking about religion. I'm just talking about how do you get out of your own way and realize maybe there's something more important in the world than you. And then the last one is, what about relationships? What are you doing there? And Margie and



I think that friends are really important, you know, and so one of the reasons we're going back to reunion is we're gathering with all kinds of old friends that we still keep in contact with. And one of the positive things of the pandemic is we've been able to keep in contact with friends and relatives and people important in our lives through Zoom. I've become a real zoomer, you know, and I don't think I'm going to have to travel anymore. If anybody wants me to speak, I can zoom in.

**Whitney Johnson:** Is there anybody who's currently influencing you?

**Ken Blanchard:** Well, I tell you, I really like the, the young leaders in our field, you know, the Simon Sineks, and the Brené Browns. I've become big fans of, of theirs. And we have a mutual kind of friendship and, and all. Because what I want to do is I care more about the field and all than protecting my thing. And if I can help anybody become great. I mean, I met Marshall Goldsmith when he was 24 years old. He came down to as a substitute teacher in a program that Paul Hersey had started in the graduate program. And so, just to see him over the years, wow. It's just unbelievable. And I think life is a really special occasion, Whitney. And I don't want to miss much of it. And I think the key is relationships and the people you get to meet and love while you're here.

**Whitney Johnson:** What in this conversation was useful for you. So, it might be something that you said. It might be something that I said, but it's probably just an idea or connection that you made in your mind.

**Ken Blanchard:** Well, I think one of the powerful things was what you said is that the sign of intelligence is to ask questions. And so, one of the things I got from this is really you're asking questions, but I ought to ask some questions myself, you know? I mean, what's important in your life? You know, what, what do you want to do going forward? You know, and I don't know who said a life unexamined, is not worth living. One of the great philosophers, I think said that. And so, you just reinforce that for me, this has been a really fun interview because of the way you are kind of trying to dig out information and draw us out to take a look at our lives.

**Whitney Johnson:** What are you looking forward to? What do you want to get done in the next couple of years?

**Ken Blanchard:** Well, I want to finish this book with my son, my son. And I don't know if, you know, I wrote a book called *The Mulligan* about golf and faith with Wally Armstrong, who was a great teacher and all. And they've made a movie out of it. And it's going to be in over 1,000 theaters on April 18th and 19th. So, look in your area it's called *The Mulligan* and it stars, stars Pat Boone.

**Whitney Johnson:** Wow.

**Ken Blanchard:** And it's the story of an uptight businessman who hasn't lost his relationship for the last five years with his wife and hasn't talked to his son for years. It's all about work. And he goes to a pro-am tournament to in order to meet a Chinese businessman that the company wants to work with. And he gets Tom Lehman as his pro and, and in the middle of the, the first pro-am he has a chance to get a birdie which would give his team an eagle, a two-under-par. And he misses a short putt, and he breaks his putter over his knee and throws it into the sand trap. So, he's walking to the tenth hole thinking he ought to go home. And Lehman is waiting for him, and he says, you know Paul, we didn't talk much during the first nine, but to be honest with you, you're not that good to get that mad. He said you know, I've found out that golf and life have a lot in common, you know. Because in golf and life you get some good breaks that you don't deserve, and you get some bad breaks you don't deserve. You get some good breaks you do deserve, and you get some bad breaks you do deserve. And you have to deal with success sometimes, and sometimes failure. And he said, if you're having trouble playing golf, I'm sure you're having trouble with your life. He said there's an old pro who sits on the front porch of the club house go see him and he'll straighten out your life and your golf. And the old pro is Pat Boone. And it's just a wonderful story about how he gets him. Because the reason it's called *The Mulligan* is in faith, Jesus is the greatest mulligan of all time. He keeps on giving us second chances. The people who have seen the movie prior to it, it's kind of a Hallmark on steroids.

**Whitney Johnson:** We will put a link to the film in the show notes. I love it. Any final thoughts?

**Ken Blanchard:** My final thought is that, is that enjoy life, you know. It's gonna have some ups and downs. And when it has some downs, rather than getting down on yourself, say I wonder what I can learn from this.

**Ken Blanchard:** And be a learner. Life is about learning and about enjoying and being with, with people. It's a very, very special occasion. Don't miss it.

**Whitney Johnson:** Ken Blanchard, thank you so much.

**Ken Blanchard:** Well, it's been a joy to be with you, Whitney. What a, what a fun interview.

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Here are three key takeaways from my conversation with Ken. Number one, great leaders adapt their management style to different people, but Ken adds a huge shot of nuance here. You also have to adapt your style depending on where a person is on their S Curve. Different strokes for the same folks, as he puts it. Every person has a portfolio of S Curves in their job. Enthusiastic beginners. Disillusioned learners. Capable but cautious. If you're not paying close attention to their trajectory, you'll miss out on their true potential.

This brings me to number two. You can't give valuable feedback until you've built a relationship. The only way to map a person's curve and thus manage them effectively is to really know them on a personal level. It pays to be vulnerable. This is the foundation of a strong working relationship. Ken warns against being a seagull manager, swooping in to give criticism without investing in the person. If you don't have time to build trust, then an examination of priorities may be in order.

Number three, collaborate with people you want to learn from. It's always tempting to roll with the same old crowd. You know them, you trust them, you speak the same language. But if growth is your goal, then it's time to identify people with a completely different perspective and team up. Ken set it simply. I love learning. Many, many, many of his most successful books are co-authored and that's not an accident. Ken seeks collaboration wherever he can find it. One final thought. Life is a special occasion. I love this quote from Ken, and I agree. Don't forget to celebrate.

For further listening, check out Simon Sinek [Episode 143](#) and Brené Brown [Episode 111](#). Thank you again to Ken Blanchard for being our guest. Thank you for listening. Thank you to our producer Matt Silverman, audio editor Whitney Jobe, production assistant Stephanie Brummel and production coordinator Nicole Pellegrino.

I'm Whitney Johnson.

And this is Disrupt Yourself.