

Great Leaders  
**GROW**

Also by Ken Blanchard and Mark Miller  
*The Secret: What Great Leaders Know and Do*

Great Leaders  
**GROW**

**Becoming a Leader for Life**

**Ken Blanchard  
& Mark Miller**



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We dedicate this book to the men and women  
who inspired us to grow and helped us along the way.



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# Introduction

Have you ever felt like you could lead at a higher level but you weren't quite sure how to get there? Have you ever wondered how to strengthen your influence and increase your impact? Have you ever considered what enables some leaders to soar above all others? We've asked these questions and more just like them. We're convinced, after more than seventy years of combined leadership, that the path to increased influence, impact, and leadership effectiveness is paved with personal growth. There's certainly more to leadership than growth, but growth is at the heart of what creates and sustains great leaders. Growth is the leader's fountain of youth.

Growing for a leader is like oxygen to a deep sea diver: without it you die. Unlike the diver, you may not physically die—but if you stop growing, your influence will erode; and over time, you can even lose the opportunity to lead at all.

Tragically, you see these losses in organizations large and small, for profit and not for profit—leaders who attain a position of leadership and fail to keep up. Or some get a promotion based on their potential, but that potential never materializes. Or perhaps you see it in



young emerging leaders who never get their shot. Their untapped potential remains untapped. What do all these situations have in common? Personal growth—or the lack of it. The failure to grow sabotages the career of more leaders than anything else.

Our capacity to grow determines our capacity to lead. It's really that simple. However, simple doesn't mean easy. Like most of life's powerful principles, the power is in the application. That's what this book is all about.

In the pages that follow, you'll go along for the ride of a lifetime with Blake, an energetic yet reluctant emerging leader. Don't get hung up on his age or lack of experience. There's some of Blake in all of us, particularly when we're faced with the challenge of growing as a leader.

Debbie Brewster plays the part of trusted mentor to Blake and shares with him four big ideas that, if applied consistently, will enable him to be a leader for life.

The idea of leading for the rest of our lives is appealing to us. We may not choose to lead in our current context or circumstances indefinitely, but name a leader you know who *wants* to become stagnant or, worse, irrelevant. We don't know any. If you decide that you want to lead well your entire life—whether in the marketplace, a nonprofit, or even in your family—you must continue to grow.

We pray that the ideas in this book will fuel your passion to grow, convince you that you can grow, show you how to grow, and empower you to grow for the rest of your life. Have fun as you GROW!

—Ken Blanchard and Mark Miller



## An Unexpected Loss

“You can be a leader.” The words had ricocheted through Blake’s mind countless times since his father had said them. In part, because he had long had doubts about his ability to lead; also because they were the last words his father ever said to him. The next day, Jeff Brown died of a heart attack.

It had all been so unexpected, as heart attacks usually are, but in this case even more so. His dad had been in great physical shape. He’d eaten the right foods, gotten plenty of rest, and exercised three to four times per week. He and Blake had just returned from the ski trip of a lifetime. No one, especially Blake, had been prepared for Jeff’s death.

A month after his father’s funeral, Blake was sitting in the university library, struggling not only with his father’s death but also with the idea that he could be a leader. Had his father been blinded by his love for his only son? Was this just another example of his dad’s eternal optimism? Or perhaps—the scariest possibility of all—could it be true? Maybe Blake could be a leader. There were so

many questions Blake wanted to ask his dad. And now, he couldn't.

"You can be a leader." Blake could still see and hear his father saying these words. When he replayed them, his responses varied from "No way" to "Really?" Blake wondered how these words would play out in the years to come. Would they be a blessing or a curse? At this point, they felt like a very heavy burden.

Jeff had been a great leader. He'd been well respected, loved by most, and very successful. He'd served his organization with high levels of integrity and skill. He had also served several nonprofit organizations in various capacities. He'd been devoted to his family and led them well. This great legacy placed a lot of pressure on Blake. Even if he could lead, he was convinced he could never lead as well as his father.

Now, Blake didn't know what to do next. He was about to graduate from college and needed a job. He was confused and scared and didn't have his father to give him advice—something he had undervalued while his father was alive. Only now did he realize how valuable that advice had been.

Hundreds of people had gathered at his father's funeral. After the service, Blake met many of Jeff's friends and coworkers. One of them was a middle-aged woman his dad had mentored for several years. Her name was Debbie Brewster; and when she introduced herself, she was fighting back tears.

*Your dad made such a difference in my life, she'd said. If there's anything I can do for you, please let me know. It would be an honor to help you in any way I can.*

Blake didn't know what else to do, so he gave her a call. She remembered him right away and sounded genuinely excited about meeting him for coffee the next day.

. . .

"I thought I was getting here early," Debbie said with a laugh as she approached Blake, who was already anchoring a table at the back of the cafe.

He stood to greet her. "Well, Ms. Brewster, I didn't want to keep you waiting. Dad always said we honor people when we honor their time."

"He taught me the same thing," she said as she took a seat. "But please, call me Debbie." She smiled wistfully. "This reminds me of my first meeting with your father. When I called him Mr. Brown, he stopped me and said, 'Please, call me Jeff.'"

"I really appreciate your meeting with me, Debbie," said Blake tentatively.

"How can I help?" she asked.

"I'm not sure," Blake confessed.

"Okay. Let's start there." Again, Debbie smiled. "We really don't know each other," she began. "But actually, I feel like I do know you pretty well."

"Really?" Blake was surprised. "How do you know me?"

"Your father and I worked together for over ten years."

Blake wasn't connecting the dots.

"He loved you with all his heart," Debbie said.

"I know he did."

“And because he loved you so much, he talked about you all the time.”

“He did?”

“Yes. We heard about your first date, your sixteenth birthday party, your game-winning touchdown at homecoming, your college search, and we even prayed for you when you had your car accident a couple of years ago.”

“Wow!” Blake was visibly stunned. “Why would Dad share those things with you?”

“It wasn’t just me,” Debbie said.

“There are more people I don’t know who know my life history?” Blake said. He didn’t know if he felt flattered or a little bit ticked.

“Yes, there are several people in the company he shared with about you. It’s one of the reasons he was a great leader.”

“I’m confused. I thought leadership was about leadership stuff.”

“Leadership stuff?” Debbie chuckled. “I guess that’s a technical term.”

She continued, “One of the things Jeff wanted to create was a high-performance team. He knew that the best teams always do life together. That’s why we always shared about our families and other important things in our lives that were happening outside of work.”

“I didn’t know that,” Blake admitted. “Would you mind if I take a few notes?”

“Not at all,” Debbie said.

After jotting down “the best teams always do life together,” Blake said, “Since you know my life history, would you mind sharing some of yours?”