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THE  
GAPS!

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# ZAP THE GAPS!

Target Higher  
Performance and Achieve It!

Ken Blanchard  
Dana Robinson  
Jim Robinson



WILLIAM MORROW

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*To readers in every kind of organization who are committed to  
zapping what "is" in order to attain what "should be"*

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## FOREWORD

There are magic moments in each of our lives. For me these have included: my six-year-old daughter running toward me, arms flung wide, with delighted screams of, “Daddy! Daddy!”; sitting quietly with my wife watching ducklings paddle in the marsh grass; listening to Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy”; seeing my son, suddenly a man, stride across the stage and receive his law degree. All these moments, and many more, are perfect. Perfect because there is no gap between what is, and what should be.

But the real story of our lives as parents, spouses, employers, or employees often revolves around our quest to zap the gaps we perceive between where we are and where we think we should be.

Now, imagine a workplace where the reality of what employees do every day matches exactly what they should be doing. No gaps to zap. Exciting thought, isn’t it? All, too often, though, the reality is just the opposite. Gaps abound.

This is exactly the challenge my friend Ken Blanchard and his colleagues Dana and Jim Robinson tackle in this book. Through a simple story, they show how two managers faced with a job-threatening situation discover how to dig down to the real core of the problem in the department, and then how they follow a step-by-step plan to zap the gaps. The process we learn with them is one that will work as well for a one-person office as it will for a big organization.

And speaking of organizations, one of the most delightful and insightful parts of the book makes it clear that zapping the gaps isn't dependent upon senior management support. It can be accomplished even under the most trying of circumstances.

If you think you've got troubles with a tough-minded, numbers-driven boss, wait until you meet Angela B. Krafft. In Angie, the authors have created the archetype bottom-line, results-oriented boss.

The problem the book's heroes, Bill and Sarah, have to solve is made more difficult because there simply isn't a bucket of money to throw on it. They have to rely on their own ingenuity—and some welcome support from a most unlikely source—to get things done. One very important message of this book is that correcting problems—zapping the gaps—is *your* responsibility. The lack of support, coaching, or money is no excuse not to perform yourself.

The strategy and system you'll discover to zap the gaps in your life are excellent, as is the message that it's your responsibility to do so, regardless of whether or not you work for an "Angie."

There is a third major message in *Zap the Gaps!* that comes with a delightful discovery at the end of the book which I'll not spoil by telling you of it here. But don't miss the message. Success isn't about knowing what to do. Success is about doing it! All of the knowledge in the world about gap zapping—even having perfect access to perfect mentors—doesn't account for squat unless you do something about it.

Ken Blanchard is famous both for his insight into management and organizational issues and for his ability to communicate solutions in ways others can grasp and put to work. I think it is safe to say that his writings have had a greater impact on the way successful organizations are actually run than those of any other person.

I have been fortunate and honored to have had the opportunity to sometimes assist Ken in his work. It is a particular pleasure to now welcome Dana and Jim Robinson into the circle of those privileged to be able to include the line "coauthor with Ken Blanchard" in their professional biographies.

—Sheldon Bowles

## PREFACE

GAPS cost organizations billions every year. When people do not work at their best, everyone loses—the customer, the organization, the employee. No organization can ignore GAPS and still survive. This book is about identifying GAPS and their causes. It's about targeting those factors that cause GAPS and correcting them without jumping to solutions. The goal is to close GAPS in a systematic way so that ultimately there is a positive impact on all stakeholders.

The setting we chose for our story is that of a call center of a large computer hardware and software manufacturer/distributor. The operational results of a call center are largely dependent on human performance. Customer service representatives—or CSRs—are responsible for providing support to the customers who call in for help. The best CSRs are able to handle calls quickly and efficiently and resolve the customer's problem on the first call. But there are other CSRs who handle calls less efficiently, and the ensuing callbacks to revisit the problems can quickly jam the systems beyond capacity.



That is precisely the problem our main character faces in our story. But while the setting is his call center, the solutions that he discovers—and, more important, the process he goes through to discover them—are applicable to every organization of every size. Even a sole proprietorship with no other employees can benefit from the GAPS strategy.

On the surface, GAPS may appear to be a simple notion—a “pat formula” that can be grasped quickly as the reader flips through the pages of this book. In reality, though, it is a strategy that managers who seek continuing success for their organizations will have to apply on an ongoing basis. We think of GAPS as a sort of law that is nearly as rock-solid as the law of gravity. Sure, we can violate it, but we’d have to be somewhere in outer space to do so—and we might never return to earth.

GAPS should be unveiled in your workplace the moment you finish reading the last page of this book. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain by implementing these concepts immediately.

Not only will you gain, but so will your customers, organization, and employees.

Enjoy zapping those GAPS!

—Ken Blanchard  
Dana Robinson  
Jim Robinson

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**Dana Robinson** and **Jim Robinson**, my coauthors, who have enhanced the viability and profitability of so many of their clients through the application of the GAPS strategy in areas of human performance. Their intensive work out in the trenches served as the inspiration for this book.

My wife, **Marjorie Blanchard**, who has lovingly identified some of my GAPS and has strengthened me as an individual as a result.

My son, **Scott**, my daughter, **Debbie**, her husband, **Humberto**, and my grandchildren, **Kurtis** and **Kyle**, who remind me that, as important as business is, loving relationships are the most important.

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*T*he Robinsons would like to add their word of thanks to the following people:

To **Ken Blanchard**, for pioneering the book genre known as “business fable” as a way of providing important ideas in a fun and easy-to-read manner, and for guiding us through the process of developing such a book.

To **Steve Gottry**, for creating characters and settings that bring our principles to life. This book represents one of the most remarkable examples of synergy in which we have been privileged to participate. From the first “kitchen table meeting” involving Ken, Steve, and the two of us, to the final manuscript, this has been a truly collaborative effort.

We appreciate our many **clients** from whom we continue to learn our gap-closing process. Our techniques have been sharpened through the work experiences we share, and it has been our privilege to collaborate with each and every one of them.

There are many people who have provided us with in-depth information regarding call centers and how they operate. In particular, we would like to acknowledge **Sheila Harrell, Shari Koonce, and Susan R. Schwartz.**

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## INTRODUCTION

The man studied the trees with a puzzled expression on his face.

There were two of them—Mexican fan palms. He knew that they had been planted in that very spot on the same day. They were of exactly the same age, the same height and the same shape when they were transported from the nursery and placed in freshly dug holes in the desert soil.

Yet, as he looked at them, it was obvious that one had thrived while the other had somehow fallen behind. One was tall and sturdy in appearance; the other seemed dwarfed. The difference was striking.

“So what happened?” he asked. “They were planted at the same time. Why is one so much shorter? Why is there such a wide gap?”

“Good question” was the reply. “In order to answer it, we’re going to have to get to the root causes.”

“You mean it has something to do with the roots?” the man asked.

“I didn’t exactly say that. There could be a number of considerations here. We can’t just jump to solutions.”

“I understand,” said the man. But he really didn’t. It was still a mystery to him.

With this brief glimpse into the future, we begin our story—the journey of William J. “Bill” Ambers, a man who is about to discover that trees and companies—and the people and teams who work for those companies—have a lot in common.



## THE ANNOUNCEMENT

*This is not good news*, Bill Ambers thought to himself as he scrolled through the announcement that had been delivered by E-mail to everyone in the company. *I'm sure it means nothing but trouble!*

It seemed that the company had just named a new division president of the Business Services Group—which is basically the call center for the large computer hardware and software manufacturer where Bill was employed as director of Customer Service. Bill quickly reflected on some of the more pertinent details about his new boss so that he could get a better picture of what might lie ahead. Many of his thoughts were merely speculation on his part, but he logged them in his mind anyway.



Angela B. Krafft. *Wonder if I'll have to call her "Ms. Krafft" or if she goes by Angie?*

MBA from Stanford. *And me with four years at a state university.*

Married. No children. *Probably no pets, either. Very ordered life.*

With a competitor for the past eight years. *Wonder if she got canned?*

Proven performer with a record of departmental turnarounds. *Uh-oh!*

Bill hated getting new bosses. In his eleven years with Dyad Technologies, he had endured three of them. Ms. Krafft would be the fourth.

*They always come in and want to shake things up right away,* he recalled. And terms such as "proven performer" and "departmental turnarounds" were, in Bill's opinion, clear cues that changes would abound whether he liked it or not.

It took just two business days for Bill's fears to become the potential nightmare he had predicted. He got "the call."

"Ms. Krafft would like to see you tomorrow for about half an hour. Do you have some time around ten o'clock?" the scheduling administrator asked.

Bill paused for a moment as if to imply there was a crucial meeting on his schedule at ten. Of course, there wasn't. "I'm available," he replied as his blood pressure rose a bit.

"Good. President's office. Ten o'clock sharp. She's looking forward to meeting you."

Probably just a "get acquainted" meeting, Bill tried to assure himself. But he knew deep down that new bosses always spelled trouble. Why would this instance be any different?



Bill actually wore a sport coat to work that day—despite the fact that he had dressed casually ever since the company relaxed its dress code. *Have to make a good first impression* was his driving motive.

Bill was normally a confident guy. He had enjoyed a number of successes in his nearly three decades in business. Since coming to Dyad, he had even been awarded the cherished "Eagle," the highest recognition offered by the company. It wasn't just the Divisional Eagle, either. It was the National Eagle. The Big Eagle.

But that was six years ago. Two bosses ago. Two major disappointments ago. The promotions he had anticipated never materialized. Two "strangers," both from outside Dyad's ranks, had moved into the vice presidencies he had sought. *I've worked hard, I'm dependable, why didn't I get those positions?*

*Maybe this time it will be different*, Bill thought as he went through the double glass doors and into the division president's waiting room at precisely 10:00 A.M. *Maybe this boss will make life better.*

"Mr. Ambers?" inquired a sophisticated-looking older woman whom Bill had never seen in his life.

"Yes."

"Ms. Krafft is expecting you. Go right in."

Bill Ambers opened the imposing door to the division president's office and was immediately taken aback. Gone were the stuffy vestiges of the past—the big mahogany desk, overblown leather chairs, and oil paintings of dead executives. In their place he saw a simple desk, an ergonomic chair, and a decorating style that could best be described as the "Tennis Hall of Fame": tennis rackets on display in Lucite cases and, as Bill would soon discover, autographed tennis balls arranged in a wooden box that had several shelves and a glass front. Pictures of all the tennis greats—both men and women—were personally autographed to "Angie" or "Angela."

The casually dressed division president rose from behind her desk, walked toward Bill, extended her hand, and greeted him warmly.

“Bill, I’m Angela Krafft. It’s a pleasure to meet you. I’ve heard so much about you. Discovered you even won the National Eagle—‘Big Bird,’ I’ve heard it called.”

Bill was immediately placed at ease. “That’s right, Ms. Krafft. It was a real honor to win that award.”

“Winning is always an honor, Bill. But please feel free to call me Angie. Formality has little place when we’re all on the same team.”

Bill again scanned the office. She was right. No formality here. Very comfortable. His eyes were once more drawn to the tennis paraphernalia. There were several trophies that he hadn’t noticed previously. “You must have quite an interest in tennis,” he offered.

“Yes. Actually, I love all sports. But tennis is my game. I played it in high school and college. I had hoped to turn pro, but when I bombed out in the Olympic tryouts, I settled on business.”

*She’s refreshingly candid*, Bill thought. Aloud he said, “That must have been a real disappointment.”

“It was, but I’ve learned that a loss in one area of life doesn’t mean I can’t win in others. The win is very important to me. And that’s why I surround myself with winners.”

“I see,” Bill said with a sudden burst of apprehension about where the conversation was headed.

“Bill, let me explain. I believe everyone in this company is a winner—or a potential winner. From what I’ve seen so far, Dyad does not hire junk.”

“I see,” Bill repeated. *Darn*, he thought. *I wish I had come up with a better response than that!*

“The problem at this call center is that our numbers are simply not in the win column. To borrow tennis terminology, we’re even on sets, but we’re down thirty-love in this game.”

“What does that mean exactly?” an ashen-faced Bill asked.

“It means that I’ve reviewed the numbers from all three shifts of customer service representatives. Incoming calls are not being picked up as quickly as we want. One-call resolution is not even close to our goal. The abandonment rate is staggering.”

Bill knew exactly what she was talking about. He knew that it often took five minutes or longer for callers to reach a real CSR. The target was two minutes or less. He knew that fewer than 70 percent of all problems were resolved in one call. And he knew that many callers abandoned their calls. They simply gave up—hung up.



Angie continued: “If we didn’t offer our customers an integrated hardware/software solution here at Dyad, they would be fleeing us in droves, in favor of those companies that provide stellar customer service. And believe me, Bill, companies like that are out there. And the barriers to entry in our markets are not all that secure. We have to protect our market share. Our products are outstanding, but customer support has to match.”

“What do you propose?” Bill asked, timidity evident in his voice.

“Bill, I need you to change the numbers. I need you to reverse the trends. We need to close the huge gaps in our performance. Frankly, Bill, I was brought in to turn the numbers around. My job—and yours, too—will be in jeopardy if we don’t. I will support you in every way possible, but because you are the director of Customer Service, a lot of the responsibility falls on your shoulders. I’m looking for you to come up with the answers.”

“I assure you that I’m doing the best I can,” Bill sputtered. “But we have a number of problems that I can’t solve. We have empty chairs. Not enough bodies. Our turnover rate is high, even for call centers. Training is not up to par. I don’t think HR is doing its job.”

“I have a question, Bill. I’d like to know if you view the HR staff as being true partners with your department? I know that in some companies they’re viewed as simply gofers, but I believe the Human Resources Department can be your greatest ally. In today’s business climate, we need to turn to one another, partner in every area, and depend on our associates to help us find solutions to meet our business needs. I want to let you in on a secret. I began my business career in HR. I later became a line manager—in a position very similar to yours. As a result, I can see both sides of the equation. I’ve learned that sometimes you have to dig for solutions. And sometimes the other guy has the shovel.”

“I understand.” These words were soon to become Bill’s mantra. Whenever he didn’t really understand, he responded with “I understand.”

“Great!” the division president said with a smile. “I suggest that your course of action be to determine where the problems really are and then draft your best plan to solve them. You’ll report back to me in two weeks, and we’ll review your plan together.”

*Two weeks? That sure isn't much time!* Bill thought as his new boss continued: "As you've probably guessed, I'm going to be meeting with every department head including, of course, Sarah Becker in HR. My philosophy is that we're not here to simply play the game and hope for a good outcome. We need to target our gaps and go for the win. All of us together." She stood up, walked around her desk, and extended her hand to a still-smarting Bill Ambers.

Bill shook her hand and headed toward the door. He couldn't wait to get out of there.

As he was turning the door handle, she stopped him.

"Bill, I read your personnel file. Your profile says you enjoy golf. Is that true?"

"It is!" He beamed as he recalled his hole in one on a 168-yard par three last April.

"I have a favor to ask then," Angela Krafft continued. "Our company supports a number of Phoenix charities, and one of them is the UMOM Homeless Shelter. I signed up to play in their benefit tournament, but I have a conflict that day. Would you be willing to pinch-hit for me? It's next Friday."



Bill could barely contain himself. He had heard all about this tournament. He could have a day off with pay, doing what he loved. And at one of the more exclusive country clubs in Scottsdale. "I'd be glad to!"

Bill walked back to his office with a broad grin on his face. *As new bosses go, she's not all that bad*, he thought to himself. But then, as the old saying goes, ignorance truly is bliss.