

GO TEAM!

Take Your Team to the Next Level

3 STEPS TO GREAT RESULTS

By the authors of the bestselling *Empowerment Takes More Than a Minute*

**KEN BLANCHARD
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*Soar Above
the Ordinary*

An Excerpt From

Go Team!:
Take Your Team to the Next Level

by Ken Blanchard, Alan Randolph, and Peter Grazier
Published by Berrett-Koehler Publishers

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FOREWORD

We were honored when Ken, Alan, and Peter asked us to write the foreword to their new book, *Go Team!* Ken and Alan have been our friends and colleagues for more than thirty years. We are delighted that they are adding this guide to understanding and achieving "Next Level" team status to the Blanchard library on team excellence.

For the past two decades significant changes have been occurring in our workplaces involving how work is structured and how decisions are made. Organizations have had to reinvent themselves to meet the demands of a rapidly changing global environment. Productivity, quality, and human satisfaction have increased in those organizations that have begun to use high involvement management practices. And teams have been the cornerstones of many of these successful change efforts.

Teamwork and collaboration are how work gets done effectively. Team-based practices, when successfully implemented, lead to higher productivity, increased satisfaction, and better employee health, and they promote our democratic values. Most people today participate in at least one and sometimes many different teams. Unfortunately, those teams often do not

perform up to their potential. One of the major barriers to effectively implementing teams is that people have not been properly trained to function in teams as contributing team members.

When we wrote, with Ken Blanchard, *The One Minute Manager Builds High Performing Teams* in 1989, we were interested in providing a basic understanding of

- The characteristics of high performing teams
- The stages of team development
- The leadership behaviors appropriate at each stage

That book, now in its second edition, has become a best-selling standard for understanding the core essentials for building high performing teams, and thousands of people have participated in training programs based on those concepts. The popular sequel, *High Five! The Magic of Working Together*, written with Sheldon Bowles, builds on those concepts and through an engaging parable shows what individuals and organizations must do to build successful teams.

Go Team! Take Your Team to the Next Level expands on the principles in these two books by building on ideas in the best-selling book by Ken, Alan, and John Carlos: *The Three Keys to Empowerment*. Now, Ken, Alan, and Peter have created a wonderful field guide that provides practical ideas and activities for moving teams to the Next Level. As you read this book, you will gain both the ability and the confidence to make effective use of *information-sharing skills* to build trust and responsibility, clear *boundary-setting skills* to create freedom, and *self-managing skills* to get great results.

This field guide will serve many teams for many years as an outstanding resource to use to increase team skills, productiv-

ity, and morale. It is an ideal follow-up to training in basic team concepts and can help ensure application and sustainability in real-world team settings.

Excellence in leadership, innovation, quality, service, productivity, and human satisfaction in the twenty-first century will best come from people working in teams that can use their potential, knowledge, and motivation. *Go Team!* is a tool that can help make that happen, and we hope you will use it to *Take Your Team to the Next Level*.

Don Carew

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Coauthors of *The One Minute Manager Builds High Performing Teams* and *High Five! The Magic of Working Together*

INTRODUCTION

MOVING TEAMWORK TO THE NEXT LEVEL

People in organizations today are increasingly being called upon to work in teams. This is because the work of organizations has become amazingly complex and changes occur constantly. More and more, companies around the world are using teams to deal with this dynamic world of work.

Unfortunately, too few people really understand how to build a team that puts into action the knowledge, experience, and motivation of its people. We do not have to look very far to see numerous examples of failed team efforts—be they in sports, business, or government. Therefore, it is no surprise that people often give up on the idea of teams and try to go it alone. We do not believe that is an effective solution for today's workplace. *Go Team!* is our game plan for building better teams—Next Level Teams.

What are Next Level Teams, and what benefits do they bring to the table? First, the benefits: Next Level Teams

- Use all team members' ideas and motivation
- Make better use of the team members' and team leader's time

- Increase productivity and satisfaction for you, your team, and the organization

Second, what are Next Level Teams? They are teams that can

- Use *information sharing* to build high levels of trust and responsibility
- Use *clear boundaries* to create the freedom to act responsibly
- Use *self-managing skills* to make team decisions and get great results

Once the picture of a Next Level Team is clear, you and your team members can assess how you operate now. Then you can begin the process of becoming a Next Level Team that gets great results.

Those of you who are fans of Ken Blanchard books will notice that *Go Team!* is a departure from Ken's easy-reading business parables. This book is intended to be a working guide filled with detailed instructions for people who want to build high performing teams.

Go Team! will take you through *three steps to great results*:

- | | |
|--------|----------------------------------|
| Step 1 | Begin learning Next Level skills |
| Step 2 | Accelerate the change |
| Step 3 | Master the skills |

Each step is designed to guide your team to the Next Level. As you, your team members, and your leader move through the book together, responsibility will shift naturally from your leader to your team. You will learn how to use your ideas more

effectively, make excellent team decisions, and feel the pride of having contributed in new and more meaningful ways.

Your leader will also appreciate your team's move to the Next Level because he or she will have new opportunities to help the team. What leader hasn't been frustrated by a lack of time to plan work, think ahead, receive training, coach team members, or investigate new equipment that may be needed in the future?

As your group moves to become a Next Level Team, you will enhance creativity, increase satisfaction, develop a sense of group pride, and achieve outstanding results. You will suddenly find your team soaring above the ordinary.

Learn what Next Level Teams are and what they can do. Then use this book as a resource and take three steps with your team to get great results. Enjoy the journey—and get ready to soar!

Understanding Next Level Teams

a picture of your future

You've no doubt heard about teamwork and its importance in today's workplace. Perhaps your organization has even tried to do more with teams and has preached teamwork.

But most people are much more familiar with the idea of a work group. It's the front line of an organization where the product is made or the service is provided. The idea of work groups is based on a view of work that is rooted in the old notion of an organization with rigid lines of managerial control, authority, and responsibility. In other words, those in leadership positions tend to assume they should make most decisions about the work, and employees tend to assume they should do what they are told by the leaders.

WHY IS A NEW KIND OF TEAM NEEDED TODAY?

In today's rapidly changing business environment, concentrating decision-making authority with a few people no longer gets the kind of results that are needed. Additionally, centralized decision making places an undue burden on those making the decisions and is frustrating to those who cannot act until

the decisions are made. Communication in the traditional work system simply moves too slowly. Because decision making is slow, people are inhibited from taking action in a timely and responsible fashion.

With this approach to work, organizations cannot compete successfully, and people throughout the company feel they are not valued. The result is low motivation and low company performance. Moving key decisions closer to the front line makes good business sense. This approach is at the core of teamwork that gets great results. But it means operating in a new world for most people.

WHAT KIND OF TEAM GETS GREAT RESULTS?

To succeed in today's complex and changing business environment, we must learn a new way of working in teams. We must take our teams to the Next Level. This means creating teams that release the power of team members—power that comes from their knowledge, experience, and internal motivation.

For example, a supervisor we know was frustrated by the amount of time he spent performing tasks that, although important from an administrative viewpoint, did not seem to maximize the use of his talents and skills in the organization. He wondered how he might change this. He thought about the valuable time he spent approving small purchases of tools and supplies for his group. Then he considered how he could better use the abilities of his people in performing tasks that did not make the best use of his experience and skills.

One of these tasks was ordering small tools and materials for the team each time a team member came to him with a request. So he taught the team members how to place the orders themselves and began delegating these purchases to the team.

He allowed them to submit small orders directly without his approval. Initially, he placed a boundary on the purchases—a cost limit of \$100—but he later widened the *boundary* as the team's (and his) comfort level grew. Team members had the authority to order needed supplies more easily without the delay of the supervisor's approval. His team members felt great. The cost of supplies decreased by 20 percent as people took more care in ordering only those materials that were really needed.

Sounds easy, doesn't it? But, given our history and comfort with traditional work groups, we have a lot to unlearn to take steps like this supervisor did. And, while people may complain about managerial control, they take comfort in not having to take too much responsibility for decisions and outcomes. Yet taking that responsibility is exactly what is required to move teams to new levels of excitement, energy, and performance.

What Is a Next Level Team?

Taking your team to the Next Level builds a team that

- 1. Is a highly skilled, interactive group of people that uses the ideas and motivation of all team members*
- 2. Uses information sharing to build high levels of trust and responsibility*
- 3. Uses clear boundaries to create the freedom and responsibility to accomplish tasks in an efficient manner*
- 4. Makes effective use of the time and talents of team members and their team leader*
- 5. Uses self-managing skills to make team decisions and generate great results for the team, its members, and the organization.*



EXAMPLES

Next Level Teamwork in action

The manager of a newly developed performance improvement department at a nuclear power plant was asked to assume responsibility for the site's newsletter. Along with the newsletter came its editor, Bill, as a new member of the manager's team. During Bill's first meeting with the manager, he complained that management had restricted him to writing a four-page monthly newsletter for a construction project of six thousand workers. Bill felt strongly that expanding the newsletter to six or eight pages would greatly improve it.

The manager wondered quietly how much additional work Bill could really do. After all, he would be responsible for collecting the information, writing the articles, taking pictures, working with the printer, and mailing the newsletter to the entire workforce. The manager was tempted to give Bill a number (he felt ten pages would be the limit) but instead gave him a clear performance objective. He said, "Bill, write whatever has to be written to adequately communicate to the people on this project, and if it gets too big, I'll tell you."

Bill left the office with new energy and enthusiasm and began to work on improving the newsletter. Using his ingenuity, he solicited help from others on his team and on the project: the graphic artist, the site photographer, the activities coordinator, craftsmen in the field, and others. Within ten months, they had transformed the newsletter into a thirty-two-page magazine and the most respected communication tool on the project. It was so informative and gained so much respect that the project's owner, the electric utility, began requesting eighty-eight copies each month for its board of directors.

As a member of the manager's team, Bill was given full responsibility for the effectiveness of the site's newsletter. In turn, Bill solicited the help of his fellow team members. As they gained comfort with their newfound responsibility and authority, they began to experiment more and more, improving the newsletter significantly and ultimately creating the site's most important communication tool.

In this case, delegating complete ownership and responsibility to Bill and the other team members created a great newsletter and a great result.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Taking your team to the Next Level

In the above example, we explained how Bill and the other team members were given expanded responsibility and authority to make decisions about the newsletter. For example, they

- *Decided how many pages the newsletter should contain*
- *Decided the content of the newsletter*
- *Were responsible for controlling the newsletter's budget*
- *Could bring in others to help with articles and pictures*
- *Answered all inquiries regarding the newsletter*
- *Decided how many hours they should work to achieve the desired results*

Thinking about this example, how could you and your team members make good use of expanded authority and more direct ownership of your tasks? What decisions does your supervisor make now that could be made by your team?

NEXT LEVEL TEAMS AND THE LEADER'S ROLE

Historically, decisions for day-to-day work and overall responsibility for the success of a work group have rested with the leader. This was one of the clear expectations of the leader's role. Leaders became comfortable with this responsibility, in fact, placing high value on this exercise of power.

Additionally, through most of the last century, certain management theories taught that workers would not accept responsibility and, in fact, would abuse time if left unsupervised. As a result, leaders were expected to closely supervise their people and certainly not delegate responsibility for work decisions.

So when we talk about shifting decisions closer to the point of action and putting them in the hands of the team, this contradicts the traditional role of the leader. One of the primary questions of managers, supervisors, and team leaders is, "What will my role be in this new environment? If my team takes on more of the day-to-day work decisions, what will I do?"

In point of fact, delegating daily task decisions actually enhances the role of the leader, as well as the role of the team members. The leader can take on new tasks, particularly those that seem to get sidelined in favor of the more immediate daily decisions. One manager explained her appreciation for Next Level Teams by stating, "Delegating certain day-to-day decisions and tasks to the team has allowed me to concentrate on issues of strategic importance to our department." Too much of her time had been spent fighting fires. Now, with the team's ability to fight the fires, she tackled new tasks with greater potential to add value.

To understand the positive impact a Next Level Team has on its leader, consider what a team leader might be able to do

if he or she had an extra two hours in the workday to spend on other activities. Indeed, we have asked this question to many leaders, and some of the responses we hear include

- Spend more time planning the work
- Look ahead to contemplate new equipment that may be needed
- Address some of the issues that impede the team's work
- Spend more time coaching and counseling team members
- Attend a work-related conference
- Interact more with customers
- Take a training course and learn new skills

It is important to understand that the shift to a Next Level Team has the additional benefit of freeing up the team leader, supervisor, or manager to focus on how better to serve the team and the organization.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Your leader's role in Next Level Teamwork

If your manager, supervisor, or team leader had an extra two hours each day—gained by expanding the responsibility and authority of your team—what new activities could he or she engage in that would add more value to the group, department, or organization?

BENEFITS OF NEXT LEVEL TEAMS

We have explored how Next Level Teams could impact your day-to-day actions in the workplace. We have also considered how the roles of leaders and team members change in such an environment. These are significant and powerful changes in how an organization operates. But is this change justified? Is it worth the effort? Does it really get great results? Let's look at two more examples.



EXAMPLES

The convenience store chain

A convenience store chain on the West Coast was experiencing employee turnover rates of 140 to 220 percent per year, normal for this industry. When the company implemented Next Level Team concepts, the turnover rate dropped to 70 percent. The considerable savings in recruiting time and expenses, training of new personnel, and disruptions to operations were certainly worth the effort from the company's perspective.

Employees also benefited from the change. Today, exit interviews indicate that when people decide to leave the company to take on new job opportunities, they are not leaving because they are unhappy. A typical response from team members before moving to the Next Level was "I was told to sell my soul for a minimum-wage job." Today a typical response is "I had probably the best first job experience I could imagine. I plan to be a customer of theirs for a long time to come." Next Level Teams in this company have created a more satisfied and loyal workforce, and the benefits for the company have been outstanding.

The telecommunications company

A telecommunications company on the East Coast made the move to Next Level Teams. Once in place, these teams were allowed to assess production methods and then make and implement suggestions for improvement. As you might expect, the teams started slowly with very few suggestions, but their suggestions did have a positive impact. Within two years, the number of suggestions had grown to more than five per employee per year, which far exceeds the national average of less than one suggestion per employee per year. Furthermore, the number of ideas implemented increased quickly to exceed 60 percent of the ideas suggested—a figure nearly six times the national average for suggestions implemented. The suggestions that were implemented saved the company hundreds of thousands of dollars. Equally important was the change in attitude of the team members. One team member said, "It doesn't matter what name is on the plaque outside; the company belongs to me and my team as much as it belongs to anyone."



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

The benefits of your team moving to the Next Level

Using the two examples above to stimulate your thinking, what do you see as potential benefits of your team moving to the Next Level? How would your work as a Next Level Team benefit the company or your department? How would it benefit your team leader? And finally, how might it benefit you and your team members?

PICTURING YOUR WORK GROUP AS A NEXT LEVEL TEAM

You have now begun to understand what a Next Level Team is and why it is so important in today's business climate. Simply put, the world of work has become too complex and dynamic for individuals to go it alone or for traditional work groups, operating with limited authority, to be successful. You and your organization need Next Level Teams that have expanded authority to act, release the creative energies of people, and provide opportunities for your team to add greater value to the organization.

Next Level Teams encourage everyone to feel valued, responsible, and engaged in the work. All participants can take pride in using their knowledge, experience, and motivation to achieve great results that will benefit the team and the organization.

As you prepare for the journey of creating your own Next Level Team, take a moment to think about what we have discussed thus far. You have probably gained some insights into your own team, and perhaps a few questions have popped into your mind. At this point it would be helpful for you to consider your team as it is today and how it compares to a Next Level Team. We encourage you to take a few minutes to discuss the following questions with your team.

MOVING FROM AN IDEA INTO ACTION

While the idea of molding your group into a Next Level Team may be appealing, it is important to recognize that understanding the idea and actually doing it are two different things. Moving your team to the Next Level, while challenging, is cer-



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Your team now

How do Next Level Teams differ from the way your team currently operates? For example, as of today,

- *Does everyone on your team feel engaged, valued, and proud as a member of the team?*
- *Does your team have and accept the authority to make decisions about its tasks?*
- *Do you understand the boundaries of your team's authority and could this authority be expanded?*
- *Does your team know how to manage itself to get work done?*
- *Does your team achieve truly great results?*

tainly doable and worth the effort. Next Level Teams can deal with complexity and change in truly amazing ways. They can also make you feel more engaged and valued at work.

The remainder of this book will take you through the following three steps to get your team to the Next Level:

During this exciting journey, you will learn to use the three key skills of a Next Level Team:

Three Steps to Next Level Teamwork

STEP ONE

Begin learning Next Level skills

STEP TWO

Accelerate the change

STEP THREE

Master the skills

- Use *information sharing* to build high levels of trust and responsibility
- Use *clear boundaries* to create the freedom to act responsibly
- Use *self-managing skills* to make decisions and get great results

*Next Level Teams
are empowered
to excel, while
traditional work
groups are
disabled. When
you put fences
around people,
you get sheep.*

Next Level Teamwork replaces self-interest, dependency, and control with partnership, responsibility, and commitment.

This journey will change you and your team members and the way you work together. At times it may be challenging, but with this book as a guide, your journey will be easier. And in a relatively short period of time you will be at the Next Level, wondering why you did not do this before.

this material has been excerpted from

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