

# KNOW CAN DO!

Put Your Know-How  
into Action

**KEN BLANCHARD**

Author Extraordinaire

**PAUL J. MEYER**

Entrepreneur Extraordinaire

**DICK RUHE**

Speaker Extraordinaire

An Excerpt From

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***Put Your Know-How into Action***

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## PREFACE

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When I think about the writing of *Know Can Do*, it's been a long time coming and has quite a history. Years ago, a dear friend of mine asked me what my biggest disappointment was with my career. That thoughtful question motivated some real self-reflection.

That's when I realized that what bothered me the most was that my work did not have universal, lasting impact. While my books were widely read, many people did not follow through on the concepts and use them consistently in their day-to-day work. My concern was that some managers seemed to be content merely to talk about leadership practices, rather than actually implementing them.

My friend said, "Maybe you're looking in the wrong place. You're trying to change people's behavior only from the outside." He went on to say that he used to do the same until he realized that

lasting change in people's behavior starts on the inside and moves out.

I knew right away he was right, because all I had been focusing on were leadership methods and behavior. I hadn't focused much on what was in people's heads or hearts.

Armed with this new insight, I realized that I needed some way to close the knowing-doing gap—a way that focused on the inside as well as the outside.

Enter Paul J. Meyer.

Paul has been a trailblazer in the behavior change business for almost fifty years. His Success Motivation Institute, Inc., founded in 1960, is dedicated to “motivating people to their full potential.” When I explained my dilemma to Paul, he was excited about trying to solve it. Give Paul Meyer a challenge, and you have a focused person beyond your belief.

After thinking about it, Paul prepared a keynote speech for a big international company on whose board he serves. The speech was entitled “The Missing Link”—what is needed to put the know-how you gain from reading books, listening to audios, watching videos, or attending seminars into action. That was the beginning of *Know Can Do*.

Working with Paul on this project was a real joy. He is an entrepreneur extraordinaire who has

founded more than forty companies with worldwide sales that exceed \$2 billion. With more than forty books in print, in some circles I am considered an author extraordinaire. What we needed to complete our team was a spokesperson who was willing to travel near and far to spread the word.

The person who came immediately to my mind was Dick Ruhe. He has worked with our company for almost twenty years and has been our number one speaker, carrying our message around the world. Dick had done some writing of his own, but as a speaker extraordinaire, he was the perfect match to work with Paul and me on *Know Can Do*.

One plus one plus one has turned into far beyond three. We are excited about *Know Can Do* and hope it gives you and your organization the strategies you need to take the knowledge you are taught and put it into action. We know it only takes one diet to lose weight—the one you focus on. In the same way, we think *Know Can Do* can make a real difference by giving people simple tools to close the knowing-doing gap and make their knowledge come alive. May our dreams come true and your goals be accomplished.

—Ken Blanchard  
*June 2007*

## THE PROBLEM

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There once was a successful author who wrote about simple truths. His books were designed to help himself and others manage and motivate people in more effective ways.

Everyone who read his books loved his stories and messages. He sold millions of copies. Yet there was one thing that troubled him.

It usually reared its head when someone told him, “I’ve read all your books and really love them.”

The author had always been taught that true learning involves a change in your behavior. In fact, he thought that learning was a journey from knowing to doing. So if the person praising his work commented about a particular favorite concept, he usually asked, “How has knowing that changed the way you behave?”

Most people had a hard time answering that question. As a result, they often changed the subject

by talking about another concept or some other book they were reading.

These kinds of interactions led the author to conclude that the gap between what people know—information they have picked up from books, audios, videos, and seminars—and what they do—how much they apply and use that knowledge—was significant. He found that was particularly true today with the incredible technology that makes knowledge easily accessible to everyone. People, he concluded, tend to spend considerably more time acquiring new information than developing strategies to use their newly acquired knowledge in their daily lives.

In his seminars the author tried everything he could think of to get people to be true learners and apply and use what he was attempting to teach them. To help them focus, he urged everyone to do three things he'd learned in graduate school from a professor who had been researching how to study for years.

The first thing the professor taught him was to insist that students take notes. Unless a person is one of the 0.0001 percent of the population who has photographic ears, listening alone will not make that person learn. In fact, three hours after a



seminar or class, pure listeners will remember only about 50 percent of what they just heard. Twenty-four hours later, they will have forgotten 50 percent of that. At the end of one month, they will have less than 5 percent recall of the new material they were exposed to at the seminar.

The author confirmed this every time he was asked to speak at an annual company meeting. He always asked the audience, “Who talked to you last year?” They would scratch their heads.

“What did the speaker talk about?” he would then ask. People in the audience would strain to remember the subject, with no recall of what they actually had heard. So he always emphasized taking notes in his seminars.

The second thing the author did was to urge participants to reread their notes within twenty-four hours and summarize what he liked to call their “aha’s” or key insights. He suggested that they either write them in clear, neat handwriting in a notebook or save them in their computers. Why did he insist they summarize their notes in clear, neat handwriting if they preferred a notebook to a computer? Because he found that after a seminar, the few people who did take notes would file them rather than review them. Later, when someone

would say, “You went to that seminar—what was it all about?” they would open their file and—lo and behold—they couldn’t even read their own handwriting. Their notes were useless.

Finally, he prodded participants to pass the knowledge on. He suggested that within a week of arriving home from the training, they schedule a conference room and invite everyone who was important in their world of work to come for half a day, so they could teach them the aha’s they’d gleaned from the seminar. The author knew that one of the best ways to begin to apply new knowledge was to teach it.

Yet few, if any, participants really followed through on these suggestions. They just seemed to be too busy when they got back to work. This reinforced the problem: it is difficult to get people to use and apply knowledge they have recently gained.

Disappointed but not discouraged, the author continued to search for answers to close the knowing-doing gap. He visited universities and talked to professors. He visited corporations and talked to training directors. He visited foundations and talked to learning officers. They all identified with the problem, but none had a good answer. He started to wonder if he’d ever find the real answer.

Then one evening after dinner the author came across an article in a back issue of *Fortune* magazine about the legendary businessman Phil Murray, who owned and operated a number of profitable companies. He read about Murray's history as a successful entrepreneur, but that is not what attracted the author to him. What intrigued the author was Murray's long history as a guru in the personal development industry. What he found particularly interesting were the comments from people who had bought the entrepreneur's programs. The article cited case after case of people who claimed that what they were taught in Murray's programs had changed their lives.

"They actually used their new knowledge!" the author said aloud.

The next morning the author found the entrepreneur's Web site and called the contact number for his office, which luckily was headquartered only an hour away. An executive assistant named Evelyn told the author that Murray wasn't there; he and his wife were at their cabin in North Carolina. When Evelyn found out who the author was, she insisted that he call Mr. Murray at his cabin.

"I don't want to disturb his vacation with a work-related matter," said the author.

“Don’t worry about it,” said Evelyn with a laugh. “Phil’s confused about the difference between work and play. He has reached the point in his life where he really enjoys helping others. I know he’d love to hear from you.”

## THE MISSING LINK

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When the author called the entrepreneur's cabin, he was greeted with a warm, hearty hello.

After introducing himself, the author said, "I'm sorry to disturb you at your cabin, Mr. Murray, but your assistant Evelyn told me you wouldn't mind answering a few questions."

"Please, call me Phil," the entrepreneur said. "And by the way, I'm a big fan of your books."

Within a couple of minutes, the author felt like he was talking to an old friend. When the author explained why he was calling, he could sense Phil's excitement.

"I've been interested for a long time in 'the missing link,'" said the entrepreneur.

"The what?" the author asked.

"The missing link," repeated Phil. "That's what's lacking in the learning process when we just read books, listen to CDs, or attend seminars."

“The missing link—that’s exactly what I want to find,” said the author. “People seem to enjoy the books I write, the CDs and videos we produce, and the seminars I conduct, yet I don’t see a lot of people actually using what they learn. The gap between what people know and what they do is driving me crazy!”

“Tell me about it!” The entrepreneur’s hearty laugh came through the phone loud and clear. “Getting people to actually use information they have acquired requires change, and change does not come easily.”

“Usually not,” said the author.

“There are three reasons why people don’t learn and start doing what they know. The first reason is this: **information overload**. They suffer from an overdose of knowledge. This is a common trap to fall into because it is easy to read a new book, listen to a new CD, or go to a new seminar. Knowledge comes easy, but that will not bring about change in behavior.”

The author nodded. “I suppose you’re right. I guess it’s more fun to find out about something new than struggle to use what you now know. Maybe that’s why we’ve become knowledge junkies.”

“It’s more fun to acquire knowledge than apply it, but that’s not the only reason people don’t do

what they know. The second reason might surprise you, but here it is: **negative filtering**. People have a dysfunctional processing system, or, to put it another way, they suffer from stinkin' thinkin'. Whenever they learn something positive, even about themselves, they put it down or discount it. This negative attitude continually holds them back, and, as you no doubt have witnessed, attitudes are tough to change. Without a positive, open attitude, particularly toward learning, you're never going to close the knowing-doing gap."

"So what I hear you saying," said the author, "is that we commonly substitute increased knowledge for change, because knowledge is so easy to get. Then our negative thinking comes into play and undermines our motivation to use what we now know."

"You're a quick study," said the entrepreneur. "The third and final reason why we don't use what we know is **lack of follow-up**. For example, how many smokers don't already know that smoking is bad for them?"

"I don't think any, probably," the author said.

"Don't most of the smokers you know have a positive attitude toward giving it up?" asked Phil.

"Come to think of it, they do."

“Then why don’t people stop smoking? Because it’s hard. The habit is ingrained into the fabric of their lives. Changing habits or behavior requires a real concentrated effort. Yet most people don’t know how to follow up their good intentions to break the habit and change their behavior.”

“As I listen to you,” said the author, “I get the feeling that closing the knowing-doing gap is not only difficult but complicated.”

“Honestly, it’s not that complicated,” said Phil. Once you really understand the three reasons people don’t do what they know, everything will become clear. Then you’ll be able to help people bring about wanted change in their own lives by using exponentially more of the knowledge available from books, audios, videos, and seminars. The key to doing that is **repetition, repetition, repetition!** It’s the missing link.”

“So *repetition* is the missing link between what people know and what they actually do?” asked the author.

“It sure is,” said Phil. “Repetition is the key to overcoming each of the reasons people don’t do what they know.”

In the background, the author could hear a child’s voice calling, “Grandpa.”



“I’d certainly be interested in hearing more about that,” said the author, “but I’ve already kept you too long. It sounds like you’re in demand.”

“Tell you what,” said the entrepreneur with warmth in his voice, “why don’t you come visit me in a couple of weeks? I’ll be back home then, and we can go into more depth about the importance of repetition and how it can improve our acquisition of knowledge, our attitudes, and our behavior.”

“You’ve got a deal,” said the author. “Your executive assistant Evelyn and I are already buddies, so I’ll make arrangements with her.”

“I look forward to it,” said the entrepreneur.

## THE POWER OF REPETITION

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Two weeks later, the author was sitting in the living room of Phil Murray's home. The whole place was elegantly casual, far more modest than a man of his means could afford. A wall of windows, however, offered an inspiring view of a deep, green valley ringed by rugged foothills.

"You said the key to overcoming the three reasons that people don't do what they know is repetition," said the author. "Could you tell me more about that?"

"I said repetition, repetition, repetition!" insisted the entrepreneur. "When I emphasize repetition like that, what I'm really referring to is what we call *spaced repetition*."

"Spaced repetition?" wondered the author aloud.

"That's right," said Phil. "Spaced repetition is a learning technique where you don't learn something in just one sitting. You're exposed to the information periodically over time, so that it sinks in."

“Tell me more,” said the author.

“Some people call spaced repetition *behavioral conditioning* or *internal reinforcement*. My good friend John Haggai calls it ‘the mother of all skills’ and ‘the mother of permanent change.’ That’s because one statement makes little if any permanent impact on someone. It has to be repeated over and over again. Not immediately, but after a period of time for reflection.

“Advertisers use this technique all the time,” Phil continued. “They call these repetitions ‘impressions.’ They’ve found that it takes a number of exposures before people identify with what they are selling and become willing to take action.”

The author thought about this as he gazed at a hawk flying high above the valley. “So a person who understands the power of repetition has a decided advantage, then,” he said.

“No doubt about it,” Murray replied. “It is difficult to change a belief, send a voter to the ballot box, or influence a person to contribute to charity through one interaction. We do not make people see, feel, or do something in one sentence. An important message almost always requires repetition over time if it’s going to have its intended result.”

## REASON 1: *Information Overload*

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“**Y**ou mentioned that the first reason we don’t do what we know is that we suffer from information overload,” said the author. “We simply have too much knowledge. How does spaced repetition affect that?”

“Good question,” Phil said. “Information overload leads to some real problems. It immobilizes us.”

“That’s painful to hear,” said the author. “I just experienced that very thing recently at a golf school. I’m a golf nut, so I decided to go to a three-day school to improve my game. But I got the opposite result—I got worse.”

“Really?”

“Yes. They taught me too much. When I got back home and tried to play, I was awful. I had paralysis by analysis. I was working on so many things at the same time I became immobilized.”

“I’ve heard about that,” said the entrepreneur. “It must have been discouraging.”

“Given what you know about information overload, what good is it to read one book after another or attend seminar after seminar?” asked the author.

“There’s nothing wrong with reading books and attending seminars,” Murray replied. “These are fundamental learning tools, and we need them. The problem comes when we expose ourselves to new knowledge all the time with no pause for integrating our new know-how and putting it into action. If we continue to expose ourselves this way, we become brain cluttered. This is why so many people are drowning in a sea of information.”

“So what’s the answer?” asked the author.

“Let me answer your question with a question,” said Phil. “Why doesn’t a fish drown when it is constantly swimming in a drowning environment?”

“Interesting question,” said the author with a smile. “Could fish be smarter than we are?”

“Not really,” said the entrepreneur with a laugh. “But they do have a built-in monitoring system that helps them take from the water only what they need and nothing else. Something we as human beings could use when it comes to dealing with the overwhelming amount of information available to us today.”

“It sounds like a matter of focus,” said the author.

“I think you’re right,” the entrepreneur replied. “We have to decide what we need to learn to help us perform better and then go about it with vigor.”

“It’s interesting,” said the author. “A friend of mine, Denny, went to a golf school recently that was very different from the one I attended, and he’s playing much better.”

“That must frost you,” said Phil. “What was the difference in the two schools?”

“Exactly what we are talking about,” said the author. “The difference was focus. The first day they analyzed all parts of his game on video. Then they picked three or four learning goals for him while he was at the school, and they would not teach him one more new thing until he graduated.”

“Graduated?” asked Phil.

“To graduate from a learning goal, he had to hit ten shots. On each shot, he had to tell one of their pros whether he was doing what they had taught him or not. If he wasn’t, he had to tell them how he needed to correct his error for the next shot.”

“Good example,” said the entrepreneur. “They made sure he could use what they had taught him. Daniel Webster, the originator of Webster’s dictionary, said that he preferred to totally master a few good books rather than read widely. To drive the point home, to totally master something, I think

it's imperative that we bathe in it until we saturate our entire being. We must slowly chew and digest it until it becomes a part of us."

"I think that's a little over the top, but I get the point," said the author. "You're emphatic about that. It sounds like our friend, spaced repetition."

"It sure is," said the entrepreneur. "It's been said that your mental constitution is more affected by a small amount of material thoroughly mastered through spaced repetition than by twenty books you read only once. The habit of attending a seminar only one time or reading a book once, while exposing yourself to new information, just builds the habit of forgetting. We are training ourselves to know and not do. It's really the exact opposite of what we should be doing."

"Could you tell me more about the habit of forgetting? I do have a tendency to forget a lot of what I read and hear."

"The human mind—everyone's, including yours and mine—is in the constant process of doing one of two things: it's either learning something new or forgetting. If we neglect something, we soon forget it. When we focus on something with spaced repetition, we remember it."

"Does that mean there's no value in attending a good seminar just once?"

“Of course there is some value,” said Phil, “but attending the same seminar a number of times with a pen and notepad would be better than just once. It’s one way you can escape the ‘forgettery process.’ The same has also been said about a book. Read it again and again, underlining it, highlighting it, and writing down key ideas. Then review your learnings again.”

“So it sounds like you don’t do the same thing when you read a book or go to a seminar a second or third time.”

“Absolutely,” said Phil. “The first time I read a book I decide I want to learn from, I just read it straight through to get a sense of it. The second time I read it and underline the key concepts. The third time I might take notes. The fourth time I could choose to read it with a learning partner. And it is important to do all this over a period of time. We all have to develop our own strategy to keep our interest and zero in on what we want to apply and use in our lives.”

“Is all that really necessary?” asked the author.

“Unfortunately, yes, from my experience,” said Phil. “To truly master an area, people should immerse themselves in a focused amount of information, rather than be exposed to a large amount.”



“And they should do it repeatedly, is what I hear you saying,” said the author.

“Yes,” said the entrepreneur. “People should learn less information more often, rather than learn more information less often.”

“Do you mean, for example, that rather than reading a large number of books, people should read a smaller number of books more times?” asked the author.

“Yes,” said the entrepreneur, “spaced repetition is the key, and

this material has been excerpted from

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