

THE  
*Ken Blanchard*  
SERIES

SIMPLE TRUTHS UPLIFTING THE VALUE  
OF PEOPLE IN ORGANIZATIONS

# Aligned Thinking

Make Every Moment Count

Jim Steffen

*How  
Successful  
People Get What  
They REALLY  
Want*

FOREWORD BY KEN BLANCHARD

An Excerpt From

***Aligned Thinking: Make Every Moment Count***

by Jim Steffen

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## FOREWORD

I'VE ALWAYS believed that life is a very special occasion—and special occasions are meant to be celebrated! Yet the pressures of life often leave us feeling too stressed to enjoy each day, let alone celebrate each moment. This book can change that.

Over twenty years ago I had the good fortune to take one of Jim Steffen's Aligned Thinking seminars. My book *The One Minute Manager* had just been published, and I was riding the wave of early success. It was an exciting time—but stressful, too. It seemed that I always had too much to do, too many interruptions, and too little control over my life and that I wasn't getting enough accomplished. Taking Jim's seminar was a turning point for me. Shortly afterward, I sent him a copy of my book with the following inscription:

*To Jim,*

*Thanks for sharing your wonderful time management system. If *The One Minute Manager* gets to be #1, the Aligned Thinking process will have played a major role. It already has made a difference in my life!*

*Best regards,*

*Ken Blanchard, August 1982*

Although I don't take personal credit for the phenomenal success of *The One Minute Manager* (to date the book has

sold over thirteen million copies in twenty-seven languages), Jim's teaching certainly helped me to stay focused and appreciate each day.

In his profound book, Jim reveals the secrets of Aligned Thinking. As you walk in the shoes of Ray and Carol Walters, you will discover how to define and live your ideal professional and personal life. You'll also learn how to overcome the frustration of too much to do, increase accomplishment and satisfaction, reduce stress, get rid of interruptions, and feel more freedom, meaning, and serenity in your life. If you have a significant other, Aligned Thinking will help you have fun together and grow closer. For your organization, it will increase productivity, motivation, and morale. For your clients, it will empower you to deliver better service and increase satisfaction and loyalty.

Many people believe that they could never align every action with what they really want. The story of Ray and Carol Walters will show you why this belief is a myth. Aligned Thinking has made a tremendous difference in my life. I invite you to open this book and learn the answers to the three Life Aligning Questions that lead to the discovery of the MIN Secret, which will help you to live your dreams. Your life is a special occasion, and it's time to start celebrating!

KEN BLANCHARD  
San Diego, California

## PREFACE

AS I was writing this book, people asked me three questions. Here are the questions and their answers.

The first question is, What can I expect from Aligned Thinking? Aligned Thinking will help you do what most believe impossible: align *every action* with what you *really* want. Because of this, if your experience is similar to that of thousands who have discovered and use Aligned Thinking, you can expect a quantum leap in the following areas:

- 1 Overcoming the frustration of too much to do
- 2 Increasing accomplishment and satisfaction
- 3 Reducing stress and interruptions

In addition, Aligned Thinking offers at least three bonus benefits for the people important to you. For your organization, Aligned Thinking will help you increase productivity, motivation, and morale. For your clients, you will be able to deliver better service and establish higher levels of satisfaction and loyalty. Finally, for you and your significant other, Aligned Thinking will give you a process by which to have fun growing closer together.

The second question is, Where did Aligned Thinking—the process—come from? I interviewed over three thousand managers about maximizing their leadership effectiveness. Before I met with them, I had them complete profiles and

plans for their own professional improvement. In the interview, I learned what they really wanted from both life and work and how the successful ones got what they *really* wanted. A summary of the best tools became the Aligned Thinking process.

Over time, I had the opportunity to share these insights with people from 140 Fortune 500 companies (for the list, go to [www.SSAinternational.com](http://www.SSAinternational.com)). I have to thank those people for their help in making the process

- Quicker to learn
- Easier to remember—some have used it daily for more than twenty years
- Simpler to use—just a nine-word MIN Secret
- All-inclusive—it applies 24/7 both professionally and personally

The third question is, What's the story behind *Aligned Thinking*, the book? Ken Blanchard helped me get my doctorate at the University of Massachusetts in 1972. Ten years later, just after *The One Minute Manager* was published, he attended an Aligned Thinking seminar. The seminar helped Ken focus on making his book the bestseller it is. Shortly thereafter, he suggested writing this book.

Over the next twenty years, I tried three times with over fifteen drafts to write this book by myself. My success was zero. Frustrated and out of options, I turned to my Higher Spirit.

Immediately, but oh so slowly, changes began to occur. The changes all seemed so natural, but after each change, progress was made! Literary agent Carol Mann said the first proposal for the book was terrible. After listening to the sad

twenty-year history of the book, she insightfully insisted, "Ken Blanchard helped you; you helped him. Now together you need to help others."

Ken agreed to help. At exactly the right time, he discovered Martha Lawrence, editor par excellence, who did marvelous things with the manuscript. At just the right time, Steve Piersanti of Berrett-Koehler appeared and helped us to bring out the simple elegance of *Aligned Thinking*. So many coincidences just seemed to happen at the right time. However, as Martha has said many times, "Jim, there are no coincidences."

Your reading this book is no coincidence. When you understand and answer the three Life Aligning Questions and discover the MIN Secret, you will have a tool set you can use for the rest of your life. Judging from my thirty years of experience, I believe this tool set will help you successfully make every moment count, so you can daily, even moment-by-moment, move closer on your journey to what you *really* want.

I'm honored and delighted to share with you what I have been so generously given.

JIM STEFFEN

December 2005

# *The Black Tunnel*

*Too much to do! I never get everything done!*

*Too many interruptions!*

*Not enough time with the family!*

*So little control over my life!*

*Life doesn't seem to have much meaning anymore.*



THESE WERE Ray's thoughts as the train from Lower Manhattan tunneled to New Jersey under the Hudson River. As Ray looked out the window into the blackness, an occasional light flashed by to show him how dark the tunnel truly was.

*How fitting, he thought. This is like my life. I feel like I'm in a dark tunnel. My life is underwater.* The infrequent flashes of light reminded him of the few lights in his life—his wife, Carol, and their two children. Unfortunately, as with the lights flashing by, he saw them for all too short a time.

*What have I really accomplished today?* Ray took out his organizer and reviewed the day. He'd skipped lunch and stayed late at work. He added two things he'd forgotten to put on his to-do list. This made the list longer than it had been at the beginning of the day. He felt miserable.

In frustrating times like these, his wife was his beacon of hope. When he talked over problems with Carol, she always helped him come up with solutions. What a great partner he

had! He resolved that he'd discuss his dark, underwater life with her tonight.

Ray looked at his watch. *Nine o'clock already.* Dinner would be over and the kids would be in their rooms working on their homework. The thought angered him. He pounded the time organizer as if it were the cause.

*Life is too long on work and too short on real meaning,* Ray thought. The muscles in his neck felt so tight they hurt. He couldn't wait for Carol to help.

"I need things to change!" he declared.

# *An Unwelcome Surprise*



AS RAY walked to his car from the train, he called Carol on his cell phone to let her know he was on his way home. She sounded a bit distracted but told him she would be very glad to see him.

Once home and settled in, Ray reviewed his frustrations and anger with Carol. He fully expected that she would listen sympathetically. With her experienced help, he would create a specific plan to solve the problems.

Ray had just started his list of frustrations when Carol interrupted.

"Too much to do? Tell me about it!" she fumed. He wasn't prepared for this. Instead of a supportive ear, he got an earful.

"I was up with you at six," she said. "As soon as the kids were off to school, I was off to work. You know I hate to have them come home before me. Even though they're older now, it's still not okay. When I got home today, they were both doing their homework, which is great. But I had to take Tammy to her music lesson, do shopping, spend time on my own paperwork, and then go back to pick her up. As if that

weren't enough, I needed to interrupt it to get Jamie to and from baseball."

Carol was on a roll. It was obvious that she also needed support.

"Work was full of interruptions interrupted by interruptions," she continued. "Our lives are empty! There's too little family time, too little control, not enough getting accomplished, and too little real meaning!"

With the flood of anxiety Carol was dumping out, Ray couldn't get a word in.

"Ray, what's happened to our dreams? We wanted to have daily family time and family weekends a few times a year. And what about alone time for us? This isn't our dream! It's a nightmare!"

Carol was close to tears. Finally, Ray saw an opening and said quickly, "You're right! We have to change if we want to take control and live our dreams. I wish my dad were still alive. He was usually busy with business, but when he was home, he'd help me think through problems. When he retired at sixty-two, he'd planned to spend more time with Mom and us kids. But he died just a year later."

"Let's not let that happen to us," Carol said.

Ray paused a moment and just looked at his wife. "Tonight, when I was in that black tunnel under the Hudson, I tried to figure out when all this started. What happened to the dreams we had before we were married?"

Carol shrugged. "I don't know."

"I think . . . ," Ray hesitated, struggling for words, "the trouble started as early as our honeymoon. Remember how I had a hard time relaxing on that glorious beach? I couldn't just enjoy the sun and sand . . . or even you. I had to check

the stock market almost every hour. There were three of us on our honeymoon: you, me, and my work!"

"Four of us!" Carol sighed. "I wasn't exactly the blissful bride. I had just landed my first managerial position. I couldn't let go, either. I called the office at least ten times during that week, when I didn't have to."

"How can we get rid of all this meaningless stress?" said Ray. "Who do we know who really seems to have their life together?"

The question hung in the air.

The silence thundered!

He restated the question. "Who do we know who has found great meaning in life?"

Carol's eyes lit up. "That sounds like Ed and Alanna! They have five kids, and one of their sons is mentally handicapped. On top of everything, Alanna finds time to distribute goods to the poor."

"You're right," said Ray. "Ed seems so centered, and yet he's got his hands full with a very successful company. He hasn't exactly had it easy, either. One of his key employees started a business behind his back. The guy used Ed's salespeople to sell to Ed's own clients. He charged Ed's clients and put the fees in his own pocket, the whole time drawing a salary from Ed. He even used Ed's copier to copy his invoices. That's how Ed caught him."

"Talk about stress," said Carol.

Ray nodded. "Yeah, it messed up Ed's business for a while. But no matter what's going on, Ed always seems to find great meaning in his life. He and Alanna have a glow about them, like they're connected to some tremendous, hidden power. I want to know what that is."

"I'm sure they'd be willing to share some ideas with us," said Carol.

"Would you call them tomorrow?" Ray held up a hand. "No, wait. You're busy enough. I'll make the arrangements."

That night in bed, Carol laid her head on Ray's shoulder, the way she slept many a night. It was reassuring. Yes, she truly was his beacon of hope in the dark tunnel. He got the feeling that the train was starting to slow down. Ray, not an overly religious man, let a little "Thank God" slip out.

# *Aligned Thinking Offers Hope*



THAT SATURDAY evening at their favorite restaurant, Ray and Carol met Ed and Alanna for dinner. As soon as they ordered their meal, Carol—being the action-oriented person she was—related the entire situation: the frustration of too much to do, too many interruptions, and too little meaning in their lives.

Ray added, “Carol astounded me. In some areas, her situation was worse than mine. We asked ourselves, Who among our friends seem to have their lives together, and how do they do it? We thought of the two of you. You seem to have some secret power we’d like to know about.”

Ed smiled. “Thanks, guys. It wasn’t always this easy. Alanna and I used to have the same feelings and problems that you do, like too much to do and too little meaning in life. Then we attended a workshop led by Coach Eric. He was our soccer coach in school, Ray. Remember?”

Ray nodded. “Sure. Never had a coach who was more positive and encouraging. We won a lot of championships with Coach Eric, didn’t we?”

"Yep," said Ed. "Turns out Coach's business is giving productivity seminars to Fortune 500 companies. He helps people get what they really want from life and work by guiding them to become Aligned Thinkers. He's highly successful at it. Thanks to Coach, Alanna and I learned how to live as Aligned Thinkers."

"Aligned Thinkers?" Carol looked dubious. "What's an Aligned Thinker? I've never heard that term before. Is becoming an Aligned Thinker complicated?"

"No. It's easy to learn and even easier to use," Ed added quickly. "Becoming an Aligned Thinker depends on a set of tools that will help you discover the MIN Secret."

"What's the MIN Secret?" Ray asked.

"MIN stands for 'most important now,'" Ed replied. "It's an amazing concept that can be used by anyone: homemakers, students, retirees, and businesspeople. It will help you make every moment count. When that happens, you are well on your way to getting what you really want. The wonderful thing about Coach's Aligned Thinking tools is that they provide a powerful, proven solution to all the frustrations you and Carol are experiencing."

"Hate to be a skeptic," Carol said, "but I find this hard to believe."

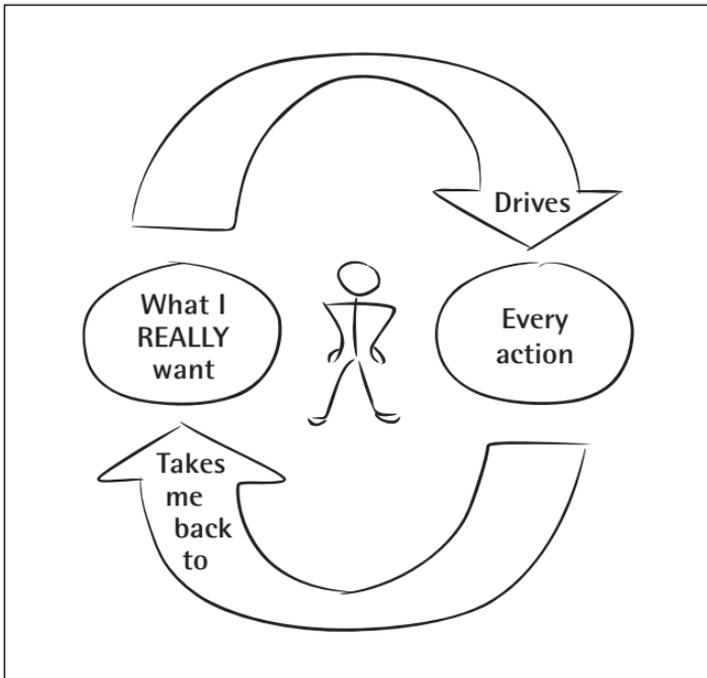
"It's true," Alanna responded calmly. "Your situation sounds like ours fifteen years ago. At first I didn't believe I could live as an Aligned Thinker, not with five kids! But once I applied Coach's simple tools, I went from living a nightmare existence—with all the frustrations you're expressing—to being an Aligned Thinker, living my dreams."

Carol shook her head. "If something seems too good to be true, it usually is. Alanna, if I didn't know you better, I'd

think you were putting us on. Make *every* moment count? With a job, husband, and two kids—I wish!”

Alanna replied, “Coach has a way of making difficult things simple. When he described what an Aligned Thinker is, we questioned whether it was remotely possible to live that way. But Coach Eric made believers out of us by showing us step-by-step how to become Aligned Thinkers. We proved to ourselves that we could really have the life we wanted, even with five kids plus.” She turned to her husband. “Ed, you can draw. Show them the Aligned Thinker circle.”

Ed drew on a napkin and said, “You are an Aligned Thinker when . . . what you *really* want from life and work drives every action, and . . . *every* action takes you, step-by-step, back to what you really want.”



Ray and Carol studied the drawing. The more they studied, the more skeptical they looked. "Every action? Do you really mean every single action?" Carol asked.

Alanna smiled confidently. "I knew the definition would cause doubts. That 'every' is both the beauty and the simplicity of it."

"At first, I was also very skeptical," Ed added. "Once Coach shared the three Life Aligning Questions that impact everyone's life every day and showed us how to answer them, we discovered the MIN Secret. We found we could align *every action* with what we really want."

Alanna added before Ray or Carol could respond, "I was amazed that with five kids, I could be aligned with *every action*. The Aligned Thinking tools, especially the MIN Secret, make it simpler than I could imagine."

This was too much for Carol. "MIN Secret? Three Life Aligning Questions to answer? What is this MIN Secret? What are the three questions that can help you align every action with what you really want?"

Ed smiled at Alanna. Alanna smiled back. Then Ed said very politely, "Would you mind if Coach Eric answered your questions? With his years of experience, he found the MIN Secret is more valuable to people if they discover it themselves as they experience the answers to the three questions. He asked us not to share the MIN Secret so people could discover it themselves. Would you mind if we respect his wish?"

There was a short pause. Then Ed added, "I can say that the secret power you mentioned Alanna and I have is partly due to the fact that all our actions are aligned with what we *really* want."

This stopped Ray and Carol. They were very curious about the last statement. They wanted to ask more. How-

ever, Ed had so politely requested that they honor Coach Eric's request, how could they do otherwise?

Driving home that night, Ray said, "I'm going to call Coach Eric in the morning. Even before we met tonight, I knew Ed and Alanna had something special. They sure do have their lives together, and now I'm really curious about how they do it. Although I have my doubts about this Aligned Thinking stuff, I trust Coach Eric. I see some light at the end of this black tunnel we're in—and it's not just another train coming."

The next morning Ray made a life-changing phone call.

"Hi, Coach Eric, it's Ray Walters. Remember me?"

"Of course I do!" said Coach warmly. "You and Stew had a great soccer give-and-go. It was always a pleasure watching you two."

Ray told Coach about his and Carol's frustrations, their talk with Alanna and Ed, their desire for the benefits of living as Aligned Thinkers, and their deep doubts that they could live that way. He finally asked Coach if he would guide them.

"Sure," said Coach. "Let's meet this weekend. All I ask is that you and Carol make a list of four or five goals that you'd like to accomplish by living as Aligned Thinkers and bring it with you. This list should be so complete that when you and Carol achieve all the goals on it, you'll be living your ideal professional and personal life."

This was much more than Ray had expected. With disbelief he said, "Could you repeat that? I'm not sure I heard you correctly."

"You heard me right," said Coach. "See you this weekend."

this material has been excerpted from

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