

SECOND EDITION, REVISED & EXPANDED

*International  
Bestseller*

# FULL STEAM AHEAD!

UNLEASH THE POWER OF VISION  
IN YOUR WORK AND YOUR LIFE

Get Focused, Get Energized, Get Great Results!

Ken Blanchard  
Jesse Lyn Stoner

Foreword by Patrick Lencioni

An Excerpt From

***Full Steam Ahead:  
Unleash The Power of Vision  
In Your Work And Your Life***

by Ken Blanchard and Jesse Lyn Stoner  
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# Foreword

I'm not going to lie to you. Many sophisticated readers will be tempted to dismiss this wonderful little book. To them, the lessons will seem simple, even obvious, and the storylike manner in which it is told might come across as homey.

But as they keep reading, something will hit them. "You know, this stuff makes all the sense in the world." And not long after that, something else will hit them. "Hey, I'm not doing half of this stuff that makes all the sense in the world!" If they have enough humility and genuine desire to make their lives better, they'll start taking Ken Blanchard and Jesse Stoner's advice and watch their organizations and families be transformed.

Once again, though, I'm going to be honest. I think the reason some people might be reluctant to implement these ideas is fear. Maybe they don't see themselves as capable of acting like Jim or Ellie—the main characters in the story—people who are passionate, emotional, even vulnerable. Maybe they had a vision in the past that failed to materialize, and now

they're afraid that creating an emotionally and intellectually compelling vision will be met with skepticism or, worse, cynicism.

And I don't blame people for having those fears, because they're reasonable ones. Anyone who wants to create a transformation—in either one's personal or professional life—will have to face the distinct possibility of rejection. But for those who do face and overcome that fear, who extract the lessons from this wonderfully powerful and simple book and put them into practice, the rewards will be extraordinary.

So I guess the only question that remains for those who are holding this book in their hands right now is “Which type of person are you?” I hope you'll have the courage, humility, and wisdom to read on and become the visionary leader that our world so desperately needs.

PATRICK LENCIONI

President of The Table Group and  
author of *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*

# Preface

We are thrilled that our publisher, Berrett-Koehler, has asked us to write a second edition of *Full Steam Ahead!* It is one of the most important books we have been involved with over the years. The first edition was an international best seller, translated into twenty-two foreign languages. We're delighted that the book has touched so many people.

In our work with organizations worldwide, we have observed that the biggest impediment to managers becoming great leaders is the lack of a clear vision—knowing who you are (your purpose), where you're going (your picture of the future), and what will guide your journey (your values). Yet less than 10 percent of the organizations we have visited are led by managers who have a clear sense of where they are trying to lead people.

Lack of a clear vision is a problem because vision is the starting point of all leadership. After all, leadership is about going somewhere. If leaders are not working toward a shared vision, their leadership can become self-serving and, ultimately, fail.

Most of the people we talk with agree that vision is important. They know that without a clear vision, they are inundated with demands for their time that can pull them off focus and waste a lot of energy. They recognize the negative effect of lack of a vision, but they are unsure of how to create one. Yet in many organizations where a vision statement does exist, it turns people off. The statement may be found framed on walls, but it provides no guidance or, worse, has nothing to do with the reality of how things actually are.

If you have never had a vision—or if you have made a failed attempt to create one—this updated edition of *Full Steam Ahead!* can help you succeed. We have brought this seemingly complex subject down to earth, making it simple to understand and easy to apply.

In this expanded edition, we have added a chapter on sustainability, provided more detail on how to implement a vision, included more information on creating a team vision, and provided a new resource section at the end of the book that includes an assessment and game plan for creating a shared vision.

Whether you're an individual seeking to live a meaningful life, a member or leader of a team, or the head of a multinational corporation wanting to guide your organization, understanding the key elements of a vision will help you manifest your dreams.

Yet this book is about more than merely creating a compelling vision. It's also about making sure that your vision is shared, that it comes alive and continues to guide you on a day-by-day basis. Creating a vision

statement is not just a one-time activity. As this book shows, visioning is a lifelong journey.

Whether it's for you personally—or for your family, project, team, department, organization, or community, we hope you will apply these ideas right away, so that you can move full steam ahead!

**KEN BLANCHARD**  
**JESSE LYN STONER**

# A Proper Ending



I stood in disbelief as a cold wind lashed across my face. *I can't believe he's gone*, I thought. I couldn't imagine a world without Jim in it. Yet, here I stood at an open grave on this gloomy winter day. I looked around at those gathered with me. They appeared to be as shocked as I felt. Jim had meant so much to all of us.

As Jim's daughter Kristen read the eulogy, the familiar words comforted me, and I could almost sense his presence.

"Jim Carpenter was a loving teacher and example of simple truths, whose leadership helped him and others awaken to the presence of God in their lives. He was a caring child of God, a son, brother, spouse, father, grandfather, father-in-law, brother-in-law, godfather, uncle, cousin, friend, and business colleague, who strove to find a balance between success and significance. He was able to say no in a loving manner to people and projects that got him off purpose. He was a person of high energy who was able to see the positive in any event or situation. No matter what happened,

he could find a ‘learning’ or a message in it. Jim valued integrity; his actions were consistent with his words; and he was a mean, lean, 185-pound, flexible golfing machine. He will be missed because wherever he went, he made the world a better place by his having been there.”

*A loving teacher and example of simple truths.* I reflected how eloquently those words described the way Jim had lived his life. This was the essence of who he was. I smiled to myself as I thought about how the words even captured Jim’s humor. He certainly loved golf, even though he had never become a “mean, lean golfing machine.”

As we walked away from the cemetery, I caught up with Kristen.

“That was a lovely eulogy,” I told her as I put my arm around her.

Kristen sighed and said, “Thanks, Ellie. But I didn’t write it. I think Dad did. I was sitting at his desk in his study, trying to compose a eulogy, when I found this one lying in the top drawer. I thought it described him better than anything I could have written.”

She paused a moment and continued, “But I don’t know *why* he would have written it.”

“I know why,” I replied softly. “I was with him when he wrote it. He didn’t write it for his funeral. It was his vision for his life. It guided him.”

Continuing on my own as I headed toward my car, I reflected on Jim’s vision. I considered how he had used the power of vision to transform the small insurance agency his father had started into a thriving,

nationally recognized company. I chuckled to myself as I remembered how he had struggled at first, knowing he needed a vision but unsure how to create one. He wasn't one of the lucky people who woke up one morning with a clear vision. Yet by understanding the key elements of a vision and what was important about the process of creating, communicating, and living it, he'd been able to create a shared vision that unified and mobilized the people in his agency. Equally important, he had created a vision for his life. And I thought about how I had used those same lessons to create a vision for my life.

Then my thoughts raced back to the beginning of the journey—a journey that had transformed not only the agency but also both of us, so many years ago. It had been a different time, a different life, a different me—yet it felt as though it were only yesterday.

# A Real Beginning



I stood before the doors of Carpenter Insurance Agency, at the threshold of a new world. At thirty-eight years old, I had never worked a day outside the house. I had been a top student in college, heading toward a rewarding career. During a summer internship at an accounting firm, I'd met Doug, a handsome, up-and-coming CPA. Our plan was to marry as soon as I graduated. Then I'd go to graduate school, earn an MBA, and get a great job. We'd have a couple of children, and with our two incomes we'd have a large house, a nanny, fun vacations, and a great life.

We did marry and I did begin an MBA program at a prestigious school. But two things happened that weren't in the plan: we got pregnant unexpectedly—twins, no less!—and Doug got sick. Shortly before the twins were born, Doug started coming home from work exhausted. At first we thought he was experiencing “sympathy pregnancy” symptoms. But when muscle weakness and cramps started interfering with his tennis game, he decided to see a doctor. After months of tests, specialists, and anxiety, Doug was diagnosed

with ALS (Lou Gehrig's Disease). By the time the twins were eighteen months old, I was a widow.

Snap your fingers and that's how fast fifteen years went by. Fortunately, Doug had a good life insurance policy and his parents helped out, so by living frugally, I was able to stay home with my children full-time. Maybe I felt like I needed to make up for their not having a father, but my children became the center of my life. I dated a bit, but whenever things started getting serious, I'd start feeling disloyal to Doug's memory and to his parents who were helping us out so much.

Now I was at a new point in my life. My children had started high school and didn't seem to need me the way they once had. The years had eased the pain of losing Doug, and the life insurance money was running out. It was time to get a job. And I was ready to start a new life. I had spent the last fifteen years taking care of everyone else. Now it was time to take care of me.

I perused ads for a business or financial position, since that had been my college major. Eventually, I found my first job in the accounting department for this good-sized insurance agency. With a bit of trepidation and a lot of excitement, I went shopping for business clothes and prepared to enter this strange new world.

...

As I entered the doors of Carpenter Insurance, I was greeted by Marsha, head of accounting, who had interviewed me for the position. She gave me a tour of the building, outlined my responsibilities, introduced me to my coworkers, handed me some employment

paperwork to complete, and showed me my cubicle. A computer had already been set up for me as well as voice mail. There was even a message waiting for me on voice mail:



*Good morning, everyone. This is Jim. It's said that Abraham Lincoln often slipped out of the White House on Wednesday evenings to listen to the sermons of Dr. Finnes Gurley at New York Avenue Presbyterian Church. He generally preferred to come and go unnoticed. So when Dr. Gurley knew the president was coming, he left his study door open.*

*On one of those occasions, the president slipped through a side door in the church and took a seat in the minister's study, located just to the side of the sanctuary. There he propped the door open, just wide enough to hear Dr. Gurley.*

*During the walk home, an aide asked Mr. Lincoln his appraisal of the sermon. The president thoughtfully replied, "The content was excellent; he delivered with elegance; he obviously put work into the message."*

*"Then you thought it was an excellent sermon?" questioned the aide.*

*"No," Lincoln answered.*

*"But you said that the content was excellent. It was delivered with eloquence, and it showed how hard he worked," the aide pressed.*

*"That's true," Lincoln said, "But Dr. Gurley forgot the most important ingredient. He forgot to ask us to do something great."*



*I believe there is nothing wrong with average lives and average accomplishments; most of the good of the world builds on the accumulated efforts of everyday people. But a life should strive for greatness, as Lincoln seemed to know.*

Who was Jim, and why was his message in my voice mailbox? This was something I hadn't expected in the business world.

Later in the morning, Marsha explained that I would spend the day shadowing my new coworker, Darryl, who would help me learn the ropes.

I joined Darryl and a few others from the department for lunch. Darryl was quiet, but the rest of us chatted about an upcoming big project, the weather, and our families. I didn't ask about the voice mail message—partly because it slipped my mind but mostly because I didn't want to sound as though I didn't know about the business world.

Although not very social, Darryl was a good person to explain how things worked because he was so totally task focused. The day flew by and I hardly had time to organize my desk.

...

Over the next few days, I dug right in. I was eager to learn everything as quickly as possible. One of Darryl's responsibilities was to collect and organize receipts from the agents for their reimbursable expenses such as travel. He wanted me to take over this responsibility and some others as soon as possible and kept me quite busy. By Friday, I still hadn't asked anyone about

the voice mail messages. But each morning, I was intrigued by the brief message that began with the words “Good morning, everyone. This is Jim.”

The messages were quite unusual. They seemed to be a mix of stories, personal philosophy, and information about things that were happening in people’s lives. For example, one message began:



*Good morning, everyone. This is Jim. Yesterday Sue Mason, one of our receptionists, had a successful operation, but they did find some cancer. They think they got most of it out, but she’s got to go through some chemotherapy. So let’s send our prayers, good energy, and positive thoughts toward Sue.*

I hadn’t met Sue, but I sent her some positive thoughts anyway. I felt it couldn’t hurt. I still hadn’t asked anyone about the messages, partly because it never seemed to be the right time to do so. And partly because it had become a bit of a mystery—something to look forward to each day. It had been a long time since I had some mystery in my life.

When I got home at the end of my first week of work, I reflected on my experiences. I was exhausted but had enjoyed the week. Although it was a little stressful learning all the routines and figuring out my job, I was excited and energized. For the most part, my coworkers were friendly, and my boss seemed nice.

Saturday morning, as I sat alone at the breakfast table drinking a cup of coffee, I felt a little sad. I had seen the twins all of ten minutes earlier in the morning. I had planned on making them a nice breakfast, but

they turned me down. They grabbed their own breakfast, which they quickly gulped down. When I offered to pour some orange juice, Jen announced, “Mom, we’re not little kids anymore!”—implying that I had offended her—and headed out the door for a swim meet.

That set the tone for the weekend. I hardly saw the kids at all the next two days. And when they were around, they didn’t seem interested in talking with me. I tried to tell Jen about my new job, but she listened politely for only a moment and then excused herself. When I asked Alex how the week had gone, he looked up briefly from his computer, said, “Fine,” and resumed what he had been doing. *Ah, I thought, they’re moving into the next phase of development—independence. They don’t need me the way they used to. Good thing I took this job.*

By Sunday night, I was bored and looking forward to going back to work. I went to bed early and was wide awake the next morning at 5:30. No point in trying to go back to sleep. I used to drive Jen and Alex to swim practice before school. Now that they were in high school, they car-pooled with older teammates. Obviously they didn’t care if I made breakfast for them. What to do? I considered going into work early. I had been assigned a project. If I did a good job, it might prove my capabilities. *Why not get at it?* I thought. I dressed quickly, left a note for Jen and Alex telling them I had left for work, and arrived there around 6:30.

It hadn’t occurred to me that the building would be locked. Walking around the side, I tested the doors

and found one unlocked in the back. I entered the quiet building with a bit of trepidation. I hadn't met many of the people who worked there yet, and I didn't want to be arrested for breaking and entering.

The door opened to a hallway. I was immediately drawn to the aroma of freshly brewed coffee coming from a room to my left. I poked my head in and noticed several photocopy machines. To my delight, I found fresh coffee in a coffeemaker on a counter near the entrance to the room. It smelled so wonderful that I walked over and helped myself to a cup. As I was enjoying the first sip, I heard a "humpf" behind me.

Startled, I turned and spilled my coffee. I hadn't noticed a small table almost hidden in the back of the room behind a row of copy machines, nor had I noticed the man sitting at it. But clearly he had noticed me. He sat comfortably with a cup of coffee and appeared to have been watching me for some time.

"Care to join me?" he invited.

Self-consciously, I wiped up the spilled coffee and joined him.

"I'm new here," I explained hesitantly. "I wanted to come in early to get some work done, and this was the only door open."

At first I thought he was a custodian or security guard and worried that I might be in trouble. I was quickly assured that was not the case. He was the kind of person who immediately made you feel at ease. We chatted easily. He was an attentive listener and showed genuine interest in me. Although I'm a private person, I was surprised at how much I opened up with him. I

told him about getting married so young, how hard it had been caring for a dying husband and two babies.

“I couldn’t imagine what it would be like to lose my beloved wife and raise our kids on my own,” he said gently.

“It has been tough,” I said. “I put my life on hold to raise my kids, and now they don’t seem to need me anymore. Truth be told, this is my first real job. I’m both excited and nervous about it.”

It suddenly occurred to me that I was being rude. “Forgive me,” I said. “You’re such a good listener that I’ve monopolized the conversation—and I don’t even know your name.”

“My name is Jim, and I’m the president of the agency,” he said with a smile. “I enjoyed meeting you, Ellie, and learning about your life. I’m glad you’ve joined our company. And now, if you’ll excuse me, it’s time for me to get to work.” He stood up and walked off, leaving me stunned and speechless.

Later that morning, when I listened to my voice mail, I heard the following message:



*Good morning, everyone. This is Jim. It’s a little after 7:00. I was talking this morning with Ellie, our new associate in the accounting department, and I was reminded of a story I’d like to share with you.*

*One day an expert in time management was speaking to a group. He pulled out a one-gallon, wide-mouthed jar and set it on the table in front of him. He also produced about a dozen fist-sized rocks and carefully placed them, one at a time, into the*



*jar. When the jar was filled to the top and no more rocks would fit inside, he asked, "Is this jar full?"*

*Everyone said yes.*

*He then reached under the table and pulled out a bucket of gravel. He dumped some gravel in and shook the jar, causing pieces of gravel to work themselves down into the spaces between the rocks. He then asked the group once more, "Is the jar full?"*

*But this time some of the group were not so sure.*

*"Good," he said as he reached under the table and brought out a bucket of sand and dumped it in the jar. Once more he asked the question, "Is the jar full?"*

*No one answered.*

*He then grabbed a pitcher of water and poured it in until the jar was filled to the brim. He looked at the class and asked, "What's the point of this illustration?"*

*One bright young man said, "The point is, no matter how full your schedule is, if you really think about it, you can always fit more things in it."*

*"No," the speaker replied with a smile. "That's not the point. That's what most people think. The truth this illustration teaches is that if you don't put the big rocks in first, you'll never get them in at all."*

*What are the big rocks in your life? Time with your loved ones, your dreams, your health, a worthy cause? Remember to put these in first, or you'll never get them in at all.*

So, one part of the mystery was solved. The voice mail messages came from Jim, the company's president. Although I now knew who was leaving the messages, I still didn't know why.

I kept my questions to myself and hurried through another busy day without thinking further about the remaining mystery or the message. Darryl had asked me to create a standardized form for agents to complete in order to be reimbursed for their out-of-pocket expenses. He wanted each type of expense to be coded and categorized so they could be easily input into the accounting records. It was complicated as there were many different types of expenses, and Darryl wanted each type listed separately.

That night as I lay in bed, I thought about what the big rocks were in my life. My children, certainly. And my new job. What else? I drifted off with images of rocks surrounding me—and I was stuffed in a jar with them.

...

Tuesday, I again awoke at 5:30 and hopped out of bed. This time I knew exactly what I was going to do. The evening before, I had asked Alex and Jen whether they would mind if I left for work before they left for school. As I expected, they said it was fine. So, I arrived at the office at about 6:30. I wondered whether Jim would be there. I tested the back door, and it opened. I walked directly to the supply room, and there he was, sitting quietly at the almost-hidden table. He didn't seem surprised to see me.

“Good morning, Ellie,” he said. “You’re early again today. Want to tell me more?” he invited with a smile.

“Nope,” I replied. “It’s your turn. I’ve got some questions for you.” I plunged right in. “Why do you leave a voice mail message every morning? How long have you been doing it? What do you want to accomplish? How do you keep thinking of new things to say? Do you get tired of doing it?”

“Whoa!” Jim responded. “You weren’t kidding yesterday when you said you were eager to figure things out quickly.”

We both laughed as I poured myself a cup of coffee.

Again, I was amazed how at ease I felt chatting with Jim. Knowing that he was the president of the company should have intimidated me. But he was so real and down-to-earth that I couldn’t help liking and feeling comfortable with him.

Smiling, Jim continued, “Those are good questions, but I’m not sure I have all the answers. “I left the first message about a year ago. The husband of one of our employees, Alice, had been rushed to the ICU with a mysterious illness. Turns out it was a life-threatening infection and his prognosis wasn’t good. Alice asked me to send my prayers for her husband, which I was more than happy to do. Then I thought, ‘Why just me—why not everyone?’ The next morning I left a voice mail message for everyone and asked them to send their prayers, good thoughts, and energy to Alice’s husband. I had no idea what impact that would have on Alice or the agency. I just thought it

was a good thing to do. Alice called me in tears the next day. Her husband had turned a corner and things were looking up. She was crying because she was so touched by the message I had left and all the responses she had gotten as a result. And I got feedback from a lot of people saying how wonderful my message was. I thought, 'I'm onto something here.'

"We had been growing so fast as a company that no one knew the important stuff going on in one another's lives. By leaving that voice mail message company-wide, I was able to help us regain something of a small company feeling."

"So your messages helped keep people connected with each other?" I ventured.

"Yes, I guess you might say that. But I think there's more. I also saw how they created energy and a sense of community," Jim replied thoughtfully. "I feel like these messages are making a difference even though I'm not sure how. I think they're good for the agency and good for me."

"How are the messages good for you?" I asked.

"Well, if I'm going to leave a message every morning, I have to spend some time thinking about what's important. I need to compose my thoughts and focus. I used to jump out of bed in the morning and hit the pavement running. Leaving these messages forces me to slow down a bit before I speed up."

"Recently I've asked my assistant to type up my messages and post them online. Occasionally an employee will post a response, although it's all quite informal."

“So if I miss a day, I can get a written version? That’s great,” I said, “because a couple of times I wanted to review them. But what I like the best is hearing your messages in your voice. It’s more powerful.”

“That’s what I think, too,” Jim replied. “Ellie, your questions and views are refreshing. And I would like to talk with you more. But now it’s time for me to get going.” I looked at my watch and was amazed! I couldn’t believe how quickly the time had flown by.

I went to my cubicle and began working. Darryl had asked me to create another standardized form for agents to complete while they were traveling. This form was for their credit card charges so the charges could be entered in the accounting system and coded quickly. Later that morning when I checked my voice mail, there it was—Jim’s message for the day. It began:



: *Good morning, everyone. This is Jim.*

: *Leaving you these morning messages has really*  
 : *helped me because so often I’m tempted to race out*  
 : *of bed, jump into my task-oriented self, get on the*  
 : *phone, start writing and tackling tasks. When I do*  
 : *that, suddenly my day takes off, and it’s out of my*  
 : *control. Leaving these messages forces me to think*  
 : *about what’s important before I jump into my day.*

I was fascinated by this message. I had met with Jim on two occasions, and a part of both conversations were woven into his morning messages.

this material has been excerpted from

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