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The Secret: What Great Leaders Knowand Do

Ken Blanchard
Mark Miller
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This volume puts a new twist on the textbook definition of a leader as a person who achieves results through others. It emphasizes that leaders must be of service to others.

It's another win for author Blanchard, a well-known speaker, consultant, and author or co-author of more than thirty books, including *The One Minute Manager*. Co-author Miller is a corporate vice president of training and development. With more than twenty-five years each of experience with organizations, the authors reveal "what great leaders know-and do."

Blanchard presents the secret of great leadership in his signature storytelling style, through the description of a newly promoted employee who learns and applies practical leadership techniques taught by her corporate mentor.

The authors have developed a leadership model based on the acronym "SERVE." Whole books have been devoted to each of the concepts that make up the SERVE model, but this book nets it out in an easy-to-follow format with useful examples. For instance, the "S" in SERVE stands for "See the Future," and the authors explain how a leader's vision gives direction to a company. (More detail on creating a compelling vision can be found in Blanchard's book *Full Steam Ahead!*)

One of the key concepts that the authors suggest in The Secret is "building relationships and connecting with people-while helping them continually perform better." They recommend taking an interest in employees' lives outside of work and making accommodations to help them have a more balanced life.

Engaging employees is another leadership idea; it involves leveraging employees' strengths, gaining their buy-in and support, and supporting them in their jobs. Finding the right person for each job is essential. One unconventional but insightful approach mentioned in the book is to "spend some time during the last interview trying to talk the candidate out of taking the job … I would rather have them decide now they don't want to work here rather than six months or a year from now. I would rather lose a candidate than a team member."

The book also stresses the importance of employee development. Great leaders realize that Individual Development Plans apply not just to the employees but also to themselves, and continually strive to enhance their own knowledge and skills as well as to improve systems and processes.

At the core of the SERVE model is the fact that great leadership is based on service. Motivation that is self-serving will not benefit the good of the team or the company. The secret is simple: "People who want to be great leaders must embrace an attitude of service to others."

CINDY KRYSZAK (August 16, 2004)

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