

# SCOTT BLANCHARD INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

## Discussing Blanchard Training & Development's Use of Heart to Heart Talks From Paul & Layne Cutright's Book Straight From the Heart

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This is Paul Cutright and this is Layne Cutright and we are interviewing Scott Blanchard from Blanchard Training and Development.

**Paul:** What is your exact title and position there Scott?

**Scott:** I am the **Executive Director of Client Solutions**. I am in charge of all of our consultants and trainers and project managers and basically in charge of all the professionals inside our training business.

**Paul:** I see. My understanding is you have used our book, "**Straight From The Heart**" and the tool that it teaches, which is **Heart to Heart Talks**, in your company.

**Scott:** Yes, we sure have. We have been using them pretty extensively over the last three years.

**Paul:** How are you using them?

**Scott:** We have been using them in three different ways. The first way, which is kind of the traditional way we learned, is using them with relationships that aren't working as well as they possibly could. And what we have been doing is actually sitting down with the two parties that aren't getting on and taking them through a **Heart-to-Heart Talks** process where we do the 3 different steps; the Discovery, the Clearing and the Affirming conversations.

And it has been really useful. We had our number one sales person and his project manager who had worked really well for a period of time and then a couple of bad things happen and they had a relationship that really spiraled down hill and it was really affecting a lot of people and it was pretty high stakes for us and for both of them. It came close to the project manager quitting.

We actually guided them through the **Heart-to-Heart Talks** process. My sister did it. It took about an hour and a half and they just emptied both of them of their thoughts and feelings and their beliefs and their memories about their relationship and what they realized of course was that, which always happens, is that they were 90% on the same page. And that some things that occurred and were snowballing and by releasing a lot of that stuff and just getting it out they were able to move forward and they're doing great.

Now our project manager and the salesperson are doing great and the sales person continues to be number one. So that was a big deal.

**Layne:** They got outstanding results and they spent what about an hour or an hour and a half?

**Scott:** Yes, about an hour and a half. They had spent countless hours with their respective managers trying to sort it out and they just weren't getting anywhere. They had

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these circular conversations. And we've done this a few times. We've had really important relationships that have kind of fallen apart.

We also have been doing it, and this is probably what is most exciting, we have been doing it in group settings with great success.

We had one account team that was managing our largest account. It was one of those businesses would be so easy if you didn't have a client sometimes. They were based out of New York City and it was an international training rollout and we were doing it in 30 countries and the account team got to a place where they were really dysfunctional.

They had been producing pretty well and then they had some setbacks. We had a couple of sales people involved and we had two or three project managers and consulting partners. The team was really in tough shape.

So my sister and I both strategized and what ended up happening was that she started out doing **Heart-to-Heart Talks** between two people who were fighting the most, the two camps individually, and they worked for about an hour and a half or two and then she actually convened the team meeting after that and was able to go through the **Heart-to-Heart** process.

What we do with groups is the same thing. We do the Discovery, then the Clearing and Affirming conversations with the sentence stems. What we typically do is, with about seven people there, we would have one person speak the sentence and everybody else would say, "Thank you" or "I understand" or "Tell me more." And then we would go to the next person.

**Layne:** So each person would say one thing.

**Scott:** Then the next person would say one thing. And the facilitator would make sure that everybody would say "Thank you" or "I understand" and that we weren't just sort of being loose on the process. And what ended up happening was remarkable. People came out and realized we were a good team, we all have good intentions and that we have really fallen into a bad pattern here. It was really a big breakthrough. And we had to do a couple tune-ups down the road.

We had one woman who had difficulty letting go and she was finally able to see, through the process, the impact of her hanging onto her memories and her judgments and her beliefs around the whole thing.

I think what it does is enables people to speak their beliefs and feelings but more than anything to speak their judgment and then to realize that nobody benefits from judging or being judged. And I think it leads to resentment and it leads to stonewalling and all sorts of things. This process enables people to really get it out

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as a legitimate gripe rather than something they are really committing to and holding on to. So that was great for these impact teams.

And then the third way that I will share with you that we have had so much fun with is we have embarked on a process in our company to really improve our teamwork, our collaboration and our internal and external customer service. We have about 300 people that work for us and our business has exploded not only in volume but in complexity so we are finding that a lot of our company is set in functional lines. And what we realize is that we need to create and foster better communication. So what we did is took every group in the company, every department, through a process of getting clear on their service vision, who they want to be when they grow up and all that sort of thing.

The one question we ask them is, "What is the barrier that is getting in your way, what is holding your group back from being able to deliver the best service possible?" And we surfaced all these barriers in the company and then what we did was we analyzed the data and we found out there were about six or seven deep, cross-functional, old, stagnant disagreements and issues that were going on in the company and we brought together representative groups and went through a whole morning to really get our act together.

I'll give you an example: There was one where there was a big problem going on between our project managers, who were upset with everybody, our client coordinators, which is sort of our administrative group, who were upset with sales and a bunch of our consultants that were upset with sales, but they were also tired of being judged by the other two groups. And then the sales people, who weren't upset with anybody except for the fact they felt this judgment coming at them.

So we got this group together, thirty-three people, and we broke into groups of three or four and we went through a really focused **Heart-to-Heart** process and we did Discovery questions and we used two of them. One was, "Something I would like you to know about me is..." and the other one we made up which was, "Something that I value in partnerships and relationships is..."

**Layne:** Very nice.

**Scott:** So we got people really thinking about that and seeing their truth. And then we got into the discovery questions and our discovery questions are typically one of two. One is, "Something I am concerned or frustrated about is..." and then the other question, which we have been using quite a bit is, "Something that I need to say is..." And that one really tends to cause stuff to come out of them that really surprises them, surprises others both in the level of frustration but also at the same time, how consistent the patterns are.

And then we got into the affirming and then what we always do is after we do these three rounds, we ask the group to basically talk in a small group about what

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we learned from this process. What became clear to us or what did we learn, what were we surprised about, and the final one was what are the implications for this group.

It inevitably has enabled us to get the finance people, the project managers, the client managers, and support people to have a legitimate place to speak what is going on for them and have the professionals and the sales people hear it and then vise-versa. And what ends up happening is that it humanizes everybody. And everybody realizes that we are all working as hard as we can, we are all trying to serve our customers, we are all committed, we are a very cause driven organization, we have very little turn over, we are all good people and what's happened is that these things have snowballed over time and we have really been able to crack through some pretty significant barriers early on. And what that does is pave the way for us to do real problem solving without judgment, without blame, without apathy, without "we've been here, we've done that", without judging, without all sorts of things as part of the process. So that stuff is released. It is amazing how we were able to get moving and actually make things happen.

So that's how we have been using it. It has been very, very exciting.

**Layne:** Fantastic. Do you every encounter any resistance when you introduce the process?

**Scott:** Absolutely. At the beginning, everybody is kind of sitting on their hands. Particularly the people who tend to be in staff positions who often times feel like, "I'm in finance and I don't make as much money as these other people, I don't fly around and I don't visit clients." A lot of time the internal people are very fearful about it and sometimes the sales people and the professionals that come in are kind of defensive. They are out there working hard and all they are getting when they return back to the company is criticism for their paperwork. They have this sort of feeling and so what we did in the beginning is let people know we talk about personal relationships, we talk about this notion of developing your own personal truth over time and that your personal truth is not reality. It is what you think, what you feel, what you believe, and what you remember. And I think people kind of get that cognitively but what is great about the **Heart-to-Heart Talks** process is that we basically force them into it and once they get into it, they open up. I haven't seen any person who has been able to sustain their judgment and all the feelings that they have had after a few rounds of **Heart-to-Heart Talks**.

We had a couple people that have had to do it twice but we haven't seen anybody that really become completely stuck so they can't get past it.

**Layne:** That's great.

**Scott:** So that has been our experience so far.

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**Paul:** So the structure of the process itself moves people through their resistance if they are willing to experiment and engage it sounds like.

**Scott:** It really does. The magic of it, as you guys know of course, and the reason you created **Heart-to-Heart Talks** is that the cognitive model of sorting out disagreements is very limited because people get into their brain. In Heart-to-Heart, because you get into this of using the sentence stems, you just then start to empty things out. And stuff comes out and oh, where did that come from? Oh, I didn't really realize I was feeling that to that extent. And it is not a therapeutic approach. You are not sitting around and talking about how you are feeling. You are just speaking and responding to these sentences and all of a sudden things just come popping up that are liberating, surprising some times, and always insightful.

**Paul:** Would you say it produces a greater level of authenticity between people?

**Scott:** Oh yes, it really does. It humanizes everybody because it's so easy to complain about sales or to complain about accounting, you know the classic arguments within companies. To complain about Joe or Mark, but when you sit down with that person eye to eye and you go through this process, everybody realizes we are all on the same team, we are all human, we are all driven by the vision of this company, we all have a desperate desire to satisfy our customers needs and we are all in the same boat.

**Paul:** They are committed to the same outcome, right?

**Scott:** What I think that they get, and this is something that we have layered on top of it, which came from some work that a guy named John Gottman did is we try to get people to get clear in the discussions afterward about what are those things that they are flexible around and then what are those things that they must have or those areas where they can't be flexible. And when we get that on the table, we usually see a very small list of things that are must haves. And when we see the must haves, we can talk about things that matter so it's like you start trimming a bunch of stuff away and you begin working on the 20% that is going to give you 80% of your results.

**Layne:** That's a very nice piece.

**Scott:** It really works well.

**Layne:** I'm wondering, are all the **Heart-to-Heart Talks** facilitated or are you hearing people saying, well all this is really great and they do it spontaneously outside of meetings?

**Scott:** The group ones have always been facilitated by a small handful of people who have read the book and we have sat down and really talked it through and we are really

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clear. We have a Power Point presentation we have developed that takes people into it.

**Layne:** That's great.

**Scott:** It's really fun. It's been used in the one-on-one situations. I know it has happened with my sister and I have done it a few different times with my wife. Occasionally we have noticed that one of us is cranky and we can't put our finger on it. We kind of break into it. So in that respect I have been using it more that way. But I'm sure it has happened in different cases but I can't share an example with you yet. I do know people have talked about it though. They've come back and said, "Wow."

**Layne:** What kind of feedback do you get?

**Scott:** They always say "That was more valuable than I thought". Most people think it is kind of hokey. Some people have been impatient like, when are we going to really get down to talking about what is bothering us. And the thing that we always come back and say is trust the process because just because you talk about what is bothering you doesn't mean that everybody's thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and memories aren't going to undermine whatever efforts or decisions are made.

Another thing that has happened in our company, and I am sure we are not unique, is like groundhog day, where we have the same conversation again and again and again and again and you never get anywhere and every time you do, people become even more cynical and don't believe things can change and that sort of thing.

**Paul:** Right. It is my understanding then that you are using **Heart-to-Heart Talks** in groups for producing positive change in the company and minimizing or eliminating those repetitive "ground hog day" kind of conversations?

**Scott:** Absolutely. I mean I think to put it in a nutshell, what the Heart-to-Hearts do is they release all the negative energy around issues, they enable people to understand where they are coming from and where other people are coming from, and what we do as a stepping off point, is we actually have conversations around what we need to do to be better or to be more effective or whatever, but it greases the skids for us to have much more meaningful conversations and problem solving conversations.

**Paul:** So it really saves time and opens up the space for those conversations to happen?

**Scott:** Yes. And a lot of these are old issues that have memories and beliefs going back fifteen years. We have very low turn over. We have people that have been around for like 20 years and they have the deep beliefs that are bad about situations. A lot of times I think they are just unaware of the weight of this issue or with the group of people around this issue have.

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**Paul:** You mentioned your sister Debbie a couple of times, she is Vice President of Sales, is that right?

**Scott:** Yes, she is **Vice President of Sales**. She has really used it well with a bunch of her sales people and within her sales leaders group because a lot of the changes were being forced to deal with were causing us to get better at the way we sell and get better at the way we deliver and get more clear with our clients and stuff like that.

Sales is a very emotional game. There is a lot of money involved, there is a lot of meaning associated with that money, and there is a lot of unintended competition between sales people and sales leaders. And in trying to address some of those larger issues and regional in-fighting and that sort of thing, she has found the process has really been useful to get people focused on a positive solution.

She and I had developed a relationship that wasn't working very well and we spent a long time going through **Heart-to-Heart Talks** and commitments on how we are going to work together better and I don't think either of us realized where the relationship had turned but because of her selling and me having to turn around and deliver on their sales and commitments, we got some feedback that it was clear and evident to people that we were not on the same page. So we used the process to get our relationship on a higher plane.

**Layne:** That can be very important in a family run business where there is not just the business at stake there is the family, the energy and the rapport, and the closeness and the affection and the trust that you want to have with your brother and your sister can be compromised sometimes when the work scene is not going in a smooth easy way.

**Scott:** Absolutely. It's often difficult to be in an adult family anyway. And when you throw the pressure of a business with 300 mouths to feed, it can be really difficult so we work really hard on working on that. And she is my little sister ultimately. She is a couple years younger than me and it's sometimes difficult to make things just right with your little sister when you work with your mom and your dad and my uncle is involved and her husband and my wife, everybody is in the business. So if we are not regularly clearing the air and getting those things that are unsaid out, then we get into upsets ourselves.

**Paul:** Everything affects everything. There are so many multiple layers of complexity in a family business like you have that is phenomenally successful.

**Scott:** There is an interesting piece of research that I uncovered last year and what it talked about was the climate of the top management team was a direct impact on the organizations ability to respond to its customer's needs. And what happens is the top management team has fear present, that it tends to create a silo

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organization because there is a lot of energy in the top management team which cascades down around protecting your turf. But, if there tends to be cooperation and harmony in the top management team, then what it does is it paves the way for harmony to exist within the different units within the firm.

We see this with our clients all the time and what we really found out was that the **Heart-to-Heart Talks** process enables us on a regular basis within our leadership team and within our family group make sure that we have the harmony that we all desire and that a lot of these transactions that we have that create feelings and thoughts and beliefs and memories that those things don't well up and that we don't start to get into a real bad pattern with our relationships.

**Paul:** That was wonderful. A quick question - I am wondering, you have been talking about using **Heart-to-Heart Talks** internally, do you ever use them externally with your client in training or consulting situations?

**Scott:** There are two applications we have thought about using them but haven't done it yet. One is when we work with clients in-depth we often develop these organization to organization teams. And sometimes these teams have the same patterns that we have inside; the relationships begin to have some stress and things begin to spiral downward. It's one of the things that we very strongly considered in an account team we worked with but then there was a change and we didn't really need to do it.

So that is one area where we thought about it. It's a great idea.

The other area to potentially do it, and we don't really do this kind of training but I've often thought how effective it could be to teach teams and managers how to use this process with their relationships.

We have not gone to the next step and embedded it into any of our training but I think there is great opportunity for that.

**Paul:** It would depend, to some extent, on the culture of the company you are working with and their receptivity to something like this because it goes deep pretty fast don't you find?

**Scott:** It really does. I actually think that what amazes me is that the touchy feeling people, the people that really want to talk about their relationship they take to the course like a duck to water. But what I have been amazed at is the people that have kind of a bias toward avoiding talking about feelings and beliefs and that kind of stuff, that this process is safe enough that they can engage in it but it sneaks up on them and what winds up happening is it ends up being very, very powerful for them in a way that isn't too woo-woo. That's what is really cool about it. And a lot of people that don't want to be woo-woo. They are feeling like they are in an

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unsafe situation and they don't want to open up and be vulnerable and this process helps them do it in a way that is not unsafe.

**Layne:** That is great. Paul and I are sitting here with the biggest smiles on our face so glad that you have taken the tool and run with it the way that you have.

**Scott:** **It has really been one of the most impact full communication technologies that we have ever used or employed inside the company.**

**Paul:** That is wonderful to hear. I am wondering, if you were going to recommend **Heart-to-Heart Talks** to another company to use in the way that you have just spent describing, do you have any advice or cautions to offer someone?

**Scott:** I think the primary advice would be to train a few people in the company in how to use the **Heart-to-Heart Talks** process and then begin to experiment and use it in situations where two individuals are not getting along. And then also to try it out in teams that have gone off center. I think that would be a great process.

We actually have a number of people in our company that are there to help resolve issues that occur and that is the group of people that we have been using to facilitate these things. So I think it is a great place to start.

The other thing that is great that I would recommend is it is a great way to start a meeting. As a group of people come together, it's a way of let's get back and let's get talking.

In 2003 we had a consulting partner and off-site sales meeting and it had been almost 2 years since we had this whole group together. 2002 was an incredibly difficult year from a business standpoint and what we did is we used **Heart-to-Heart Talks** to surface and release the disappointment that people had around September 11th and the year that followed. It was really cool. One of the questions that we used was, "What has been really hard and disappointing for me in the last year?" It was their disappointments being held onto that they had to get rid of. It was an anchor. It was holding us back from winning.

**Paul:** So you are talking about an all consultants and sales meeting. Is that what it was?

**Scott:** Yes. We had about 80 or 90 people there.

**Paul:** That's a pretty good size group.

**Scott:** We broke it into groups of three and we did **Heart-to-Heart Talks** so you can break people into pairs or even table groups and do it. Its amazing when it first starts happening, you have to be disciplined to lay the process out. But once you lay it out, people get it really quickly and they love it and it's like you have to pull them out of it with a hook. It really enables a group to really get connected.

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In that case there was not a relationship problem but everybody had been through such an emotional upheaval through 2001, 2002 and the down turn of our business and all that sort of thing. It was this environmental thing that was weighing people down that we had to really move past.

**Paul:** So it really helped people acknowledge what was true, I'm hearing you say, and let go of it and move on.

**Scott:** Absolutely. Everybody had an emotional reaction in that 2 year period of time.

**Paul:** Thank you for remembering to share that. That was a great story.

**Layne:** Thank you for bringing your own particular genius to the process. We developed it, we have been using it and the way you are applying it is in slightly different ways and I just like hearing about it. Thank you.

**Scott:** **Thank you guys for the idea. We have leveraged Heart-to-Heart Talks and the practice of it more than anything we have done in the company in the last ten years.**

**Paul:** That is really wonderful and gratifying to hear. Thank you for allowing us to make that kind of contribution to you and your wonderful family and your company.

**Scott:** Thanks so much. I'm happy to share.

This is Paul and this is Layne thank you very much Scott for joining us in this conversation. I am confident that the people who hear this will open new possibilities for them in their personal and professional relationships.