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of anecdotes'  
*Guardian*

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manager'  
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'Page upon page  
of insight' *Sport*

# CARLO ANCELOTTI

## QUIET LEADERSHIP

Winning hearts, minds  
and matches

WITH CHRIS BRADY & MIKE FORDE



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QUIET LEADERSHIP

‘There is nobody better than this international crisis manager to explain how to handle superstar players (Cristiano Ronaldo and Gareth Bale), difficult club presidents (Silvio Berlusconi and Roman Abramovich) and hysterical media’

SIMON KUPER, AUTHOR OF  
*FOOTBALL AGAINST THE ENEMY AND SOCCERNOMICS*

—  
[This book] has a cool, empathetic style, and is enjoyable and insightful. Steeped in glory, loved by players for his light touch, Ancelotti is probably the most coveted coach in the world . . . For him, football clubs can be “families”. With his genial style, his cultivation of personal bonds with players and directors, it is clear which he prefers. No tactical revolutions, no psychological ploys, no memorable quotes, just frictionless success in all of Europe’s major leagues. There is no record quite like it . . . *Quiet Leadership*, to judge by the book and his personal manner, is less a technique than a disposition, an aura. By standing still in football’s storm of hype and cupidity, he reassures players’

FINANCIAL TIMES

—  
‘Carlo Ancelotti: the arch firefighter who always pays his way . . . Everyone likes the man, which is why the book’s other voices include Cristiano Ronaldo, Alex Ferguson, Paolo Maldini, John Terry, Alessandro Nesta and David Beckham. They all have affectionate things to say about him as a man – his personal warmth, his tactical flexibility, his humour, his tendency to lapse into Italian on the rare occasions when he loses his temper in the dressing room – but their stories, and his, create a picture of one way of managing a football team: a rational approach to the job of running a team amid the climate of insanity found at the top of the European club football pyramid . . . a treasury of anecdote and insight’

GUARDIAN

—  
[Ancelotti’s] new book, *Quiet Leadership*, contains page upon page of insight into his methods from Cristiano Ronaldo, Zlatan Ibrahimovic, John Terry and more

SPORT

## ABOUT THE CO-AUTHORS

Carlo Ancelotti has won football's ultimate prize, the Champions League, a record five times – twice as a player and three times as a manager. He has coached clubs that include Parma, Juventus, AC Milan, Paris Saint-Germain, Real Madrid and Chelsea (winning the 'Double' in 2010). He has won titles in every country in which he has managed – a record he aims to maintain in his latest role as the head coach of Bayern Munich.

Chris Brady is professor of management studies and director of the Centre for Sports Business at Salford University. His books include *The 90-Minute Manager*.

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# CARLO ANCELOTTI

## QUIET LEADERSHIP

**Winning hearts, minds  
and matches**

**WITH CHRIS BRADY  
AND MIKE FORDE**



**PORTFOLIO**  

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*Giuseppe and Carlo Ancelotti, Stadio Comunale, Turin 1985*

*Carlo Ancelotti*

*In loving memory of my first great leader, my father, Giuseppe*

*Chris Brady*

*For my wife, Anita, and my favourite daughter,  
Eleanor, because I love them both*

*Mike Forde*

*To my father who taught me the responsibility that goes with  
leading others; to my mother who showed me how to  
create an environment for people to be inspired and comfortable  
to be themselves and to my wife, Daniela, who unconditionally  
supports me daily to be the best version of me I can be.*

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## Preface

As a young boy growing up on a farm in the north of Italy, did I ever imagine myself becoming a leader in a multimillion-pound global industry? Of course not. All I wanted to do was play football.

Now, when I look back, I can see that we were poor but happy and my family taught me the beginnings of many of the lessons you will read about over the course of this book. Things like respect and loyalty, the value of money and hard work, the importance of family – these seeds were planted early for me, and they grew and flowered when I was privileged to embark on a career first as a professional football player and then as a manager.

*Quiet Leadership* is a collection of reflections on my time in football and my thoughts and philosophies on what it takes to be a leader in my profession. By extension, these lessons can be taken into other professions; there are similarities between leaders in all fields, be it in football or business, and I am a big believer in importing knowledge from other areas, just as I have exported my own expertise to Paris, London, Madrid and now Munich. We should never cease to learn.

## PREFACE

A ‘quiet’ approach to leadership might sound soft or perhaps even weak to some, but that is not what it means to me, and it is definitely not what it means to anyone who has ever played with me or for me. The kind of quiet I am talking about is a strength. There is power and authority in being calm and measured, in building trust and making decisions coolly, in using influence and persuasion and in being professional in your approach. When you watch Vito Corleone in *The Godfather*, do you see a weak, quiet man or do you see a calm, powerful man in charge of his situation?

My approach is born of the idea that a leader should not need to rant or rave or rule with an iron fist, but rather that their power should be implicit. It should be crystal clear who is in charge, and their authority must result from respect and trust rather than fear. I believe that I have earned the respect I am shown, partly through a successful career delivering trophies for my clubs, but perhaps more importantly because of the fact that I respect those I work with. These people trust me to do the right thing, just as I trust them with their roles in the organization.

My method of leading is part of who I am – it is true to my character and an essential element of my personality. Leadership can be learned but cannot be imitated. It is possible to observe other great leaders at work, but if your natural inclination is to be quiet, calm and take care of others it is unwise to try to be anyone else.

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## PREFACE

The ‘Quiet Way’ has been with me from my childhood with my father and in football ever since I became captain of Roma as a player, continuing when I joined Milan, where the players looked to me as one of the leaders in the dressing room, and then throughout my time managing not only that club but also teams including Chelsea, Paris Saint-Germain and Real Madrid. It is the same approach that I am taking with me to Bayern Munich as I begin a new challenge there, and it is the very approach that anyone hiring me knows they are buying into.

When I left Madrid in May 2015, I decided that this would be a perfect time both to sort out a long-standing neck problem that had been restricting me more and more and to take a sabbatical. I was able to spend more time with my wife, Mariann – we’d married the previous year, shortly after Madrid won the Champions League – at our home in Vancouver. Then I waited to see which jobs were vacant for the next season, because I definitely wanted to work again. After playing, it is the best job in the world, to manage a football club, and I have been so lucky to manage the champion teams in some of Europe’s greatest cities.

I knew that there would be pressure at different stages of my sabbatical for me to start at a new club, whenever other managers in Europe looked to be coming to the end of their own periods in charge. I was linked with Liverpool FC in the media – a great honour – and I was definitely interested, but not disappointed when I wasn’t appointed. Jürgen Klopp is right for them; he will succeed there. My

rest away from the game has been good for me too, but when an opportunity as great as the Bayern Munich job comes along, it's impossible to refuse. I am planning to have the longest period of sustained success of my career.

What you won't find in this book is a chapter on relationships. This is because relationships form the foundation of everything I do as a leader, so they feature on every page: relationships with those above me, with my support team and, most importantly, with the players.

Without the players there can be no game, just as without people and a product, there is no business. The thousands in the stadiums, the millions watching at home – they're not paying to see me, or Pep Guardiola or Sir Alex Ferguson on the sidelines; they want to see the players, the magic they can conjure up. Working with these athletes, taking care of them and helping them develop and grow, building trust and loyalty, sharing our successes and bouncing back together from disappointment, this is the heart of my job for me. This is why I get up for work every day with a smile on my face.

As children, we first play the game because we fall in love with it. When I started playing professionally, I couldn't believe my luck at being paid to do something I love. Sometimes, somewhere along the way the pressures and difficulties on and off the pitch can cause the passion to fade or die. It is my responsibility to help the players stay in love. If I can succeed in this, then I am happy.

Working on this book, sharing stories and many great

## PREFACE

memories – as well as some difficult ones – with my two co-writers and friends, Chris Brady and Mike Forde, has been a very rewarding experience for me. My hope is that you will find something in here to take into your own life and career – and perhaps something that makes you happy too.

*Carlo Ancelotti*

*February 2016*

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# INTRODUCTION

CHRIS BRADY

This book took several years to pull together, mostly because the three of us – Carlo Ancelotti, Mike Forde and I – wanted it to be a genuinely collaborative piece of work. We started out by defining what we *didn't* want the book to become. It wouldn't be a standard autobiography, it wouldn't be aimed primarily at a football audience, it wouldn't be an academic business book and it certainly wouldn't be a kiss-and-tell.

We agreed we wanted it to be a book of which we could all be proud. A book that would appeal to a business and a sports audience either involved in, fascinated by or aspiring to leadership roles in the broadest sense. We wanted it to be honest, original, compelling and worthy of discussion and dissent by a curious readership. It isn't a series of stories, though, of course, they are important; instead it is a book based primarily on the reflections of an expert practitioner in leading talented teams in one of the most competitive markets imaginable.

We have set out to reveal Carlo Ancelotti's fundamental

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principles and leadership journey, his core business and skills, his formative experiences, how he learned to lead, and the Ancelotti brand – how he sees himself and is perceived by others. We are aiming to get to the heart of how he's continually developed, dealt with setbacks and delivered repeatedly on the biggest possible stage.

With our business and sports leadership backgrounds, we have used this opportunity to hold up the generic theories of experts and academics to intense scrutiny, comparing them unflinchingly to Ancelotti's direct experience. As the professional landscape changes radically across all sectors and markets, business leaders have to be better armed to deal with managing diverse and highly talented – and often problematic – workforces. Using the backdrop of elite sport, we will draw out the leadership insights and lessons of one of the greatest talent managers in the world. We will investigate and challenge strongly held beliefs around how you should lead and manage the best people around you.

Naturally, the central voice is Carlo's, as is the grammar. The narrative of the book is told directly by him – the result of more than fifty hours of in-depth interviews we conducted with him around the world, focusing on how his experiences illuminated critical business issues both current and timeless. The lessons

are implicit in his reflections, but for ease of reference we have included summaries at the end of each chapter explaining the main points of the 'Quiet Way'.

We wanted this to be a book simultaneously *by* Ancelotti and *about* Ancelotti, so we have also included interviews with those who know his leadership qualities best. You know what they say: if you really want to know who you are, you have to learn what people say about you when you leave the room. We asked Carlo's teammates, colleagues, opponents and, perhaps most importantly, those who have played for him to talk about him behind his back. Players interviewed include Cristiano Ronaldo, David Beckham, Zlatan Ibrahimović and John Terry, all of whom have also played for other giants of football management, the likes of Pep Guardiola, José Mourinho and Sir Alex Ferguson. Ferguson also features as an opponent and his colleagues include Adriano Galliani, the CEO of AC Milan, who, in one role or another, was Ancelotti's boss for around thirteen years when Ancelotti was either a player or a coach.

It is testament to the strength of the bonds that Ancelotti makes, and the impact he has had on these elite names, that they all freely gave their time to talk about him. Indeed, they were so keen and so lyrical and passionate once they got started, that the interviews almost always overran their slots – I think

Zlatan would still be talking now if, after ninety minutes, I hadn't tentatively prompted him to wrap things up.

\*

Why is there a need for yet another book on 'leadership'? It must be the most discussed and written-about topic in management. Blogs, TED talks, books, the media, academic articles . . . it's everywhere, and you can't get away from it. Historically, there have been more theories of leadership than you can shake a big stick at. Early theorists even assumed that leadership was directly related to membership of the aristocracy and was, therefore, genetically preordained. This led to the 'great man' theory of leadership, which is still prevalent today and includes such diverse luminaries as Moses, the Dalai Lama, Patton, Crazy Horse, Custer, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, Elizabeth I, Florence Nightingale, Colin Powell and Genghis Khan – take your pick or name your own.

Other pivotal ideas have included the trait theory of leadership, which argues that there are certain generic traits which can be identified in all great leaders. By contrast, situational theorists argued that great leaders emerged as a result of place, circumstance and time, or what we lay people might call luck – the

place where preparation meets opportunity. Others were more interested in the development of the individual within an organization; for example the American psychologist Abraham Maslow emphasized the manager's role in supporting subordinates.

High on the current buzz list are authentic leadership, which entails ethical and transparent behaviour; transformational leadership, where leaders forgo self-interest by transforming and inspiring followers to perform beyond expectations; and servant leadership, which extends Robert Greenleaf's original 1970s work in which leadership was framed as focusing on the needs of the followers (employees, players) and where the leaders' primary motivation is to serve. Greenleaf prioritized the 'caring' nature of these leaders, not in an altruistic way but as a managerial imperative.

As Pat Summitt, one of the greatest if lesser known coaches in sporting history, has said, 'People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. To get people to work hard for you, you need to show them you want them to achieve career success for *their* sake.' There are clear echoes of Jim Collins's 'Level 5' leaders who, Collins argues in his classic *Good to Great*, possess the paradoxical mix of ambition and humility. These leaders are highly ambitious, but the focus of their

ambition is not themselves; it is on those who will deliver success (employees or players), and they also feel no need to inflate their own egos.

It is estimated that as much as \$50 billion is spent annually on leadership training and development around the world. Perhaps that's because trust in the qualities of those in corporate, political and military leadership positions is at such a low ebb that we are trying to rectify the situation in some sense. It's also an indicator of how important the issue is perceived to be.

However, perhaps the real reason we find it so difficult to settle on a specific leadership model is because each leader is, in fact, an amalgam of all the various traits, styles, characteristics and approaches mentioned above, but with the ingredients mixed in different proportions.

If so, then Carlo Ancelotti's understated leadership style, his 'quiet leadership', may be unique to him and to the experiences that have shaped him during a life spent almost entirely in the goldfish bowl of professional football in countries such as Italy, Spain and England – and now Germany. Countries where the sheer interest in the sport and the consequent financial implications are at their most intense. Unique or not, it is clearly an effective and successful approach and one which demands our attention, not least because, as will become clear, Ancelotti

ticks a huge number of the boxes identified in any current leadership debate.

\*

Of all the leadership challenges, one of the most difficult is managing talent. Most research shows that it is highest on the list of concerns for CEOs. Management guru Tom Peters has asked:

Are you a certified talent fanatic? Whether you're the head of a six-person project team or the CEO . . . you must become as obsessed about finding and developing top-flight people as the general manager of any professional sports franchise is about recruiting and training top-flight players. In an age when value added flows from creativity, a quirky, energetic, engaged talent pool has become the primary basis of competitive advantage.\*

What better field, then, to study than football, where the coverage and interest in the management of talent is almost an entertainment industry in itself? The so-called 'war for talent'

\*Tom Peters, 'Leaders As Talent Fanatics', *Leadership Excellence Essentials* 23, 11 (2006), p. 12.

has been a staple factor in football since it was first played, certainly since its first professional incarnation. Football clubs pay out, on average, more than 50 per cent of their revenue on less than 10 per cent of their employees.

The most recent Deloitte Millennial Survey, conducted across twenty-nine industrialized countries (in all of which football is played professionally), found that millennials want more open, collaborative, flexible working environments; they are imaginative, think laterally and believe that they can do anything. They are less loyal because they now recognize that employers treat them as assets and consequently they're going to treat their employers similarly. Deloitte concludes that 'millennials have forced us to rethink the way we work'. Well, virtually every elite footballer is a millennial. So, again, what better laboratory is there than football in which to observe and analyse the people who lead this type of workforce? Equally, the way Ancelotti manages upwards is similarly instructive for anyone in modern business.

The book is called *Quiet Leadership* for a reason; Ancelotti goes about his business in a calm but authoritative way that can go under the radar of a media desperate for scandal. When managing the super egos of the world's greatest players he has been described as the 'diva whisperer'. When managing

upwards, Ancelotti is described as the uber-diplomat; Italian journalist Gabriele Marcotti has spoken of Ancelotti's 'biblical patience' with the notoriously demanding Real Madrid president, Florentino Pérez. Indeed, when he appointed Ancelotti, Pérez described him as a manager who could keep the stars happy while finding a way to make it work without grumbling in public. What more could a president want?\*

When Ancelotti was at Chelsea there was a rocky period. His management was coming under scrutiny from the media as a result of some leaked briefings from within the club. After he held a press conference, *Guardian* journalist Barney Ronay wrote a revealingly accurate description of Ancelotti's 'Quiet Way':

What today provided was a welcome draught of Ancelotti's own wonderfully moreish charm. For the neutral, he has been a disarming presence at the heart of the Chelsea project, maintaining throughout his early successes an air of something jarringly wry and sceptical within the corporate labyrinth of the club's managerial superstructure. Admittedly, this is almost entirely down to his rogue eyebrow, that arching salt and pepper caterpillar,

\*Clearly much more, because less than two years later Pérez sacked Ancelotti and only a few months afterwards his successor, Rafa Benítez, had also gone.

perpetually humpbacked with what appears to be a sense of portable deadpan irony. The Ancelotti eyebrow seems to speak to us directly, offering its own subtitled counter-commentary on whatever conciliatory patter might be emerging from the Ancelotti mouth. It is a quality the English have warmed to. We understand eyebrow speak. The unspoken, the taciturn and the repressed: this kind of talk is our kind of talk.

*(Guardian, 22 November 2010)*

We couldn't have put it better ourselves.

# **PART ONE**

## The Leadership Arc

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## CHRIS BRADY

There is an extensive literature around the concept of what we will call, in this book, the leadership arc. Whether it is the mid-2000s work of Ken Blanchard or George D. Parsons and Richard T. Pascale's 'Summit Syndrome',\* or even workshops taking place at the Wharton School, there is widespread recognition that the careers of even the greatest leaders follow a similar pattern.

Currently the average tenure of a FTSE 100 CEO is 5.18 years; for English Premier League managers it's just 2.36 years (if Arsène Wenger is excluded from that equation, the average drops to 1.7 years). In Italy's Serie A the average is 1.31 years; in Spain's La Liga it's 1.34 years. The longevity record is barely better in other sports. In the USA, a manager in the NFL (National Football League) has an average tenure of 3.4 seasons; a new

\*George D. Parsons and Richard T. Pascale, 'Crisis at the Summit', *Harvard Business Review*, March 2007.

manager in the NBA (National Basketball Association) can expect 2.4 seasons.

The end can often be sudden and brutal. The English professional leagues saw a total of forty-seven managerial dismissals in the 2014–15 season, and seventeen of those were first-time managers, many of whom will find it very difficult to get another opportunity to manage.\* Furthermore, more than 150 coaches lost their jobs as a direct consequence of the instability caused by sacking the manager and the desire of the club to bring in a host of new staff. Other than for an elite few, reference to the merry-go-round of football management is far from reality; in the majority of cases their family has suddenly lost its main source of income. This is not a business for the faint hearted.

The parallels with business are very clear. Every week a sporting manager is subjected to the same scrutiny that a CEO receives with quarterly statements. As an English Premier League chairman once stated, 'Every week 40,000 stakeholders turn up and tell me how they think I'm running the business.' Everything in sport is compressed into the span of a single

\* Statistics from the League Managers Association.

season, whereas the life cycle in business, before results can be validated, is likely to be around ten quarters or thirty months.

For both business and sport there seems to be an inexorable arc to the leadership lifespan in successful organizations, notwithstanding outliers such as Sir Alex Ferguson, Bill Belichick at the New England Patriots or Gregg Popovich at the San Antonio Spurs.

Is such an arc inevitable, or is it possible to identify key tipping points, moments at which the leaders themselves can alter the course of events either by exiting of their own accord or by remaining in the post by changing the dynamic? Carlo Ancelotti's career and successes in four of the top European leagues suggests both are possible, but require an early awareness of the typical leadership trajectory and an ability to manoeuvre around the pitfalls in each type of trajectory. Now, over to Carlo.

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## 1. Experience

Unless you happen to be a one-off like Sir Alex Ferguson at Manchester United, the careers of leaders in most walks of life follow a similar path. My time at Real Madrid demonstrates it clearly and it shares important similarities with the time I spent at all my clubs.

First, comes the courtship, when the club identifies you and tries to acquire your services. Then comes the honeymoon period, when everyone – the players, the staff, the fans – give you the time to establish yourself, but which unfortunately, as always in life, never lasts long. Next comes success and stability, should you be able to achieve it – for a top club this means trophies, but success is measured differently further down the league. Eventually, this stability plateaus and then the problems begin: the cracks in the relationship. If we look at Madrid, this was undoubtedly when my challenges took hold. Finally, comes the breakup – the inevitable parting of ways. We can call this process, this rise and fall, the leadership arc.

At Madrid, my leadership arc was very tight, very compressed, but it is the same at every top club. It was less than a year for David Moyes at Manchester United. I have had a much shallower arc too, eight years at Milan, which is a very long time to spend at such a big club. The average tenure of a manager in any of the top divisions in England, Spain or Italy is a long way below this: the compressed arc is the norm.

Along the way there are pivotal moments, where the leader can influence events and determine their path, but these key points on the arc have followed me throughout my time in football, starting with my first job.

### *Climbing the Ladder*

#### *First Job: Reggiana*

If I were advising the Reggiana president today, when he was contemplating hiring a retired player with local roots to manage the club, I would say: ‘What do you want him for? He’s got no licence and he’s never coached anywhere before. He might have been a good player, but who cares?’ Thankfully for me, the crazy way of football does not work like that.

Make no mistake: Reggiana hired me because I was a famous player and a local boy. It’s the little things, sometimes. It might not make any sense at all reading it, but