

Announcer: Welcome to the Carey Nieuwhof Leadership Podcast, the podcast all about leadership, change, and personal growth. The goal? To help you lead like never before, in your church or in your business. Now, your host, Carey Nieuwhof.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, hey everybody, and welcome to episode 225 of the podcast. My name is Carey Nieuwhof, and I hope our time together today helps you lead like never before. I know we just released an episode yesterday, but we're back, because I wanted to do a deep dive on church growth. Last week, we brought you an extra episode, featuring our all-time most downloaded episode, a rebroadcast, but this one's brand new. This one's fresh.

Carey Nieuwhof: Last week, we talked about breaking the 200, 400, 800, 1000 barrier. This week, we're going to go into a similar sphere, but these guys have done it all the way to 5000 people. We spend the majority of the interview, just before you go like, "I don't have a category for that!" We spend the majority of this conversation talking about the first 30, the first 100, the first 150, the first 200, then up to 400, because you know what? Those are the hardest barriers to crack.

Carey Nieuwhof: Joshua Gagnon and Daniel King know it first hand, and so we completely geek out. This is like a get your notebook and understand you're not alone, and the pressures that you're facing are the pressures that they faced. They tell you where they struggled and how they overcame the barriers, including disappointing the congregation, telling people, "Yes, I used to hang out with you, but I can't hang out with you anymore." All that stuff that keeps churches from growing ... We go into the weeds on that one in this episode, so I really think you're going to enjoy it.

Carey Nieuwhof: We're doing it, because we are talking a lot, in all of my channels, on my blog, on my podcast, about breaking church growth barriers, because it's not about breaking the barrier, per se. Do you know what it's about? It's about reaching the potential that you have, as a leader, in reaching your community with the good news of Jesus.

Carey Nieuwhof: Literally, thousands of pastors have come to me over the years with this exact problem. You see new faces at your church, but the attendance numbers come in the same, week after week, so you float at 75. Even though you had three new families, three months later, you're still at 75, or maybe it's 150 or 250. It's almost like you've got a bucket, but it's got holes in it, and it doesn't matter how much water you pour into a bucket with holes in it. It's never going to get more full.

Carey Nieuwhof: You just can't break past that number, and what is that? Well, the good news is, if you're anything like those pastors I've worked with, there is an answer. There is a way to go into detail. Obviously, in this conversation we talk about it, but I've got a course, called the Breaking 200 Course. It has now helped over a thousand churches learn what they need to do to move past the 200 barrier. We hear from people all the time.

Carey Nieuwhof: I was reading an email earlier this week from a guy who said, "Man, we were about 150. We did the course. Now, we're 300, and we are marching toward 500." It just like, boom, lifts the ceiling, and all of a sudden you're keeping the people that, before, you were losing. Just so you know, you can learn more at [breaking200course.com](http://breaking200course.com), but this is the lowest price. This is the last 48 hours before the price goes up. Next week, the price will be going up. You can find out more at [breaking200course.com](http://breaking200course.com) and, because I understand small church dynamics, I've been there, this is the only course I offer that comes with 12 licenses, because you're going to want to run your board through it or your team through it, so it breaks down to less than 20 bucks a person. Okay, so just head on over to [breaking200course.com](http://breaking200course.com). I want to help you break through the barriers that don't need to be there.

Carey Nieuwhof: In the meantime, why don't I dive into the conversation with Josh Gagnon and Daniel King, who are two of the founders of Next Level Church, all over New England, and probably soon, coming to a community near you. Well, Josh and Daniel, welcome, or welcome back, to the podcast. Great to have you guys today.

Joshua Gagnon: Absolutely, honored to be here.

Daniel King: Thank you so much.

Carey Nieuwhof: Josh, you're a frequent flyer here on the podcast, vying for one of our most popular and frequent guests of all time. Congratulations.

Joshua Gagnon: Hey, I've been working really hard at that, just really put that as my life achievement goal, is I want to be the most frequently listened to person on the Carey Nieuwhof-

Daniel King: That's like your Twitter bio? That's what goes-

Joshua Gagnon: Well, I mean, listen. You've made it big if you can get on the Christian world's largest podcast. You've done something okay with your life.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, it's really good to have you here, but what we're doing today is we're exposing the reality, because we brought Daniel King on. Really, when you look behind the scenes, he's responsible for everything, isn't he?

Joshua Gagnon: He is. He's been here from the very beginning. He was our first staff member ever. I remember he called me up, Carey. He said, "I just attended the church on our anniversary. I live in Arizona. We came to Boston for our anniversary celebration. I attended Next Level Church, and I wanted to know, are you hiring, because I really loved it?"

Joshua Gagnon: I laughed and said, "I'm not even hired yet."

Joshua Gagnon: He said, "What if I raised my own support?"

Joshua Gagnon: I said, "You had me at raise your own support," and so he was our first ever staff member, and somehow he's put up with me until now.

Carey Nieuwhof: I know we talked about-

Daniel King: He probably put up with me.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, I know we talked about that offline, but I want you to tell people. What was going through your mind? Because Next Level Church was not like 10,000 locations and a large megachurch at the time. It was a guy trying to start something, who, by your own accord, Josh said, "I didn't really have any training. I didn't know what I was doing. We had no money, so it was perfect conditions for the launch of a church." What made you say that, other than the Holy Spirit, Who I'm sure was involved?

Daniel King: Yeah, I think it was mostly that, might've been a bad dinner the night before. I'm not really sure of the details. I mean, a lot of the credit goes to my wife, honestly. She looked at me after church that day and literally said, "God was talking to you." I'll never forget the train ride we were on, going into Boston for the rest of the day, and she's like, "God was talking to you."

Daniel King: I did the typical, "What do you mean?" playing it off kind of thing and, yeah, she gets a lot of the credit for that, really. I think the thing that was the most attractive and the most appealing was just the willingness to be so authentic. Even just the communication from stage that day, the people you met in the lobby, and all those things. People were just being real. I think that was the most appealing thing and most different thing.

Carey Nieuwhof: What were you doing at the time? What was your day job?

Daniel King: I was a youth pastor, way, way out in Arizona. I was a youth pastor.

Joshua Gagnon: Yeah, he came to Next Level when we were, what, a couple weeks old?

Daniel King: That visit was week two.

Joshua Gagnon: Week two, ever.

Daniel King: We didn't, of course, know that, when we walked in the door, but it was week two, ever. It definitely wasn't the fancy light show or the fog machine that was the attractive part.

Joshua Gagnon: If you like Christmas lights as a backdrop, we were the place for you.

Daniel King: Hey, that's trendy now.

Joshua Gagnon: When I say Christmas lights, I mean Christmas tree lights.

Carey Nieuwhof: Where were you meeting, Josh? Where did you launch?

Joshua Gagnon: Yeah we were in a high school, and it sat 800 people, and we had about 30 to 40 adults on a great weekend. I can remember feeling as if it was just so awkward. I wasn't smart enough to pipe and drape the room. I didn't know how to shrink it, so it actually felt like there were humans there.

Joshua Gagnon: When he came, I can remember looking out, and he was just one of the few families. We wanted first time guests. He was a young family, and I was like, "Oh, my goodness, there's a young family here." I remember right where he sat. I could bring you to the exact seat, because, I mean, it's not hard to recognize two out of 20 people.

Joshua Gagnon: I went down after, and I'll never forget. I was like, "All right, land this young family." I was like, "Land the plane, Gagnon. Land it." I said, "Hey, man, how are you?" I'll never forget. He said, "Good, man. We're visiting from Arizona." Every ministry leader listening, they know that feeling where it's like-

Daniel King: Oh!

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, I'm done with you, got to go find someone else.

Joshua Gagnon: Exactly, exactly. There's got to be somebody else I can talk to, and so, yeah, that was the end of the conversation. Next thing I knew, like I said, he called, asked for a job. I was only getting paid \$100 a week on weeks that we broke \$1000 in giving. I laughed. I said, "We are not even ..." Actually, you came on staff, raised all your own support, and you were-

Daniel King: I was getting paid more than you that way.

Joshua Gagnon: Yeah, you were getting paid better.

Carey Nieuwhof: Better fundraiser.

Daniel King: That's a true story.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's funny.

Daniel King: That's true. That's a true story. I just knew you were supposed to raise funds. I think that's what it was.

Joshua Gagnon: Yeah, so that was the beginning, man, of our days with Dan. That's why it's such an honor to have him on here with me. I think a lot of times, certain people, certain names, will get the credit, right?

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah.

Joshua Gagnon: The lead pastor of the church, but the truth is ... You know this Carey. The truth is without the Daniel King's in our world, man, we are a mess. Daniel King clearly, no exaggeration, is much smarter and wiser than I am, in many of the things we're going to be talking about.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, I'm glad to have you both on. You guys are both friends, and so it was fun to start that way. You know what I did not know? I knew it was small beginnings. I did not know it was an 800 seat auditorium, so-

Joshua Gagnon: Oh, that was brutal.

Carey Nieuwhof: Dude, that's like ... That's death...

Daniel King: There's some unbelievable stories. Not only was it 800 seats, but how often would you say they kicked us out to the middle school? Once every four or five weeks, they'd just be like, "Oh, by the way, next weekend you have to move." We had to somehow tell everybody that we were moving, find a new way to set up our stage, our equipment.

Daniel King: It was quite the adventure at the beginning.

Joshua Gagnon: Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof: Church planting at its finest. We're talking about breaking church growth barriers. I wanted to talk to both of you, because you've had a lot of experience with it. Principle one in your church planting book, when it comes out, Josh: Do not launch church in an 800 seat auditorium with 30 or 40 people, all right? That's chapter one.

Joshua Gagnon: Exactly.

Daniel King: Principle one.

Carey Nieuwhof: We've already got that lesson nailed, but you didn't stay at 30 or 40 people, so catch us up. Here we are, toward the end of 2018. Next Level Church is how old now? You guys 10?

Daniel King: 10 years old.

Carey Nieuwhof: 10, I thought so.

Joshua Gagnon: 10 years old, yeah, we're double digits.

Carey Nieuwhof: '08 to 2018, so we've grown a little bit past 30 people. What are you at these days on a typical weekend? How many locations? How many states? Fill us in.

Joshua Gagnon: Yeah, we've got nine locations, soon to be 10. We are across four different states from the Northeast to Florida. We had 10 locations recently, but we closed one down, based on our new structure and modeling, as far as making sure ... I think we'll talk a little bit about it, but making sure locations are at a certain size, where they're able to do what it is they're required to do, to perform the vision and live in the expectation of the leadership. We could talk about that in a little bit. Yeah, nine locations, soon to be 10, across four states, anywhere from ... Well, depends on the weekend you're asking, but anywhere from four thousand to five thousand people in attendance.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's awesome. That's incredible, and in an area where megachurches don't grow, where they were ... Really, you guys were kind of the first, right? I mean, we're talking about centuries.

Joshua Gagnon: Yeah, I think we were definitely one of the first churches, if not the first church, in the Northeast to use video teaching as a 100% method at a location. Pastor Gordon MacDonald, who I know we both admire, pastored I think probably the first megachurch in New England, which was Grace, but certainly there's not too many which you would clarify or define as a megachurch, 2000 or more people, in the Northeast, and so we're honored to reach people. We've done it in a little bit of a different way. We didn't grow one location to a megachurch. We really spread out and reached a bunch of different regions, in order to be able to call ourselves a megachurch, so sometimes I feel like I'm cheating.

Carey Nieuwhof: Right, but no. I mean, that's great. You're in Vermont, New Hampshire ... Wait, no. You're in Vermont. Let me guess. Are you in New York State, too?

Joshua Gagnon: No, yeah, New York, Massachusetts, New Hampshire,-

Carey Nieuwhof: Florida.

Joshua Gagnon: Florida.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's incredible.

Joshua Gagnon: Yep.

Carey Nieuwhof: Okay.

Joshua Gagnon: It's been a lot of fun. When we started, we ... a little bit of a funny backstory that I may have mentioned before. We didn't even ... I had no clue that we were in an unchurched region when we started, because I had never read a church planting book. I'd never been to a church bigger than 200 people, so I had no clue the odds were against me, which I often like to thank God for, because my faith wasn't already in question, based on statistics. I had no idea what we were up against. Here we are today. I didn't know we were starting in a tough area. God's been faithful and God's been good.

Carey Nieuwhof: A church of four or five thousand people, nine, soon to be 10 locations, over a decade, in a heavily unchurched area, where 97-98% of people don't go to church, in an area where, historically, churches haven't grown, and that's a pretty cool story. You guys have tons of spadework in figuring out how to crack church growth barriers. You had to go through all of them, so I'd love to go back to the launch. We already talked a little bit about it, but in those early days, how did you manage to break the 200 barrier for the first time, because it wasn't on Sunday one or two was it?

Joshua Gagnon: No.

Daniel King: No, I think it's possible that we might have hit it the first Christmas. We didn't even know enough to actually write things down and count all the data and stuff back then. We were actually talking about it before we started recording. Did we hit 200 on Christmas? We're not sure, but the time when we know we really went over it was Easter of one year. We had launched on Easter, and then that first year, on Easter, is when we know for sure that we really crossed over that. We had been called by that school we were talking about, with the 800 seat auditorium. They had literally told us, "You're going to have to not meet here anymore." We were like, "Oh, that's cool." That was probably three weeks before Easter maybe.

Joshua Gagnon: Yeah, I remember we were actually at a conference down South.

Daniel King: Yeah, out of town, yeah.

Joshua Gagnon: They said, over the next five weeks, you can't be in the school. There's things going on.

Daniel King: Man.

Joshua Gagnon: We thought, what in the world are we going to do? From the Carolinas, we started making phone calls, and that's when we moved Next Level Church to a movie theater for the first time. That's where we would meet for the next several years. However, that first Easter, we did a campaign called Phony-

Daniel King: Faith.

Joshua Gagnon: Phonyfaith.com. We put out all these signs, and we did some marketing. Now, when I say a lot of marketing, we were putting together every penny we had, and we did phonyfaith.com. On that website, we just talked about how, far too often, we see people with phony faith, so on and so forth. We used that. That would be the first time that we ever broke, for real, 200 people. Man, you would've thought ... I mean, it looked so big.

Daniel King: Revival.

Carey Nieuwhof: Revival, yeah.

Joshua Gagnon: Oh, it looked so great. Yeah, it was like, "Don't stop us now, baby."

Carey Nieuwhof: But it took a year.

Joshua Gagnon: Oh, yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof: Which is actually relatively fast, in church planting circles. Were you expecting it would be a just add water thing, when you launched it? Did you think you would grow faster?

Joshua Gagnon: Yeah, yeah, in the entire journey, I've thought we would grow faster. I was texting with our executive team the other day, and I said that if you would've told me that we'd be here 10 years in, on day one, I would've been amazed. However, this entire journey, I've always felt disappointed by the pace, and so, yeah, I think I've always felt disappointed in the pace. When the dream in your heart is large, it's really hard to be content in the building of that dream, because you see the big dream in your heart, yet God's called us to be faithful step by step in order to seeing that dream come to reality.

Joshua Gagnon: Yeah, that's the problem with a visionary, Carey. You know this. It's like we see it. We see it in our heart, right? We're like, man, I know what it's going to be. I know what God's going to do. Yet, we have to, every weekend, with our eyes, look at something that doesn't quite look like what we see in our heart. That's always been a difficulty for me.

Carey Nieuwhof: Daniel, when you look at that first year, and you think about how you structured it, what are some things that you did well, that you think helped you respond to the growth that did come your way, and what are some things that you're like, man, we kind of blew that?

Daniel King: Yeah, I don't think we had a lot of structure in that first year. I think that the biggest thing we had going for us was just simply a willingness to work. Like Pastor had said before, there was no expectation, like, oh, we're in a hard place, so it's going to be slow and steady. It was just, we all just felt like God called us to do this, and so why wouldn't it grow? We've just got to do our part, and it's going to grow.

Daniel King: It was probably a few years, before we started to really meet somebody at a conference, and people would be like, "Oh, that's not supposed to happen in New Hampshire." That's like ... We really didn't have that idea at the beginning, so we just ... It was just grit. It was just aggression. It was just passion. It was just an unwillingness to accept, this weekend we're not going to grow, and so constant just marketing, digging a new ditch every week.

Joshua Gagnon: Yeah, it's not a structure or a system, Carey. I grew up in churches where we would pray for God to do the miraculous, and we would pray for growth, but we didn't really do much in order to prepare for that growth. I can remember always thinking, I'm never going to be a pastor that expects God to do something that I didn't dig a ditch for Him to fill with rain.

Joshua Gagnon: If I'm going to expect God to do something this weekend, I'm going to have a shovel. I think, when God gives you a dream, He hands it to you with a shovel. That shovel is for us to dig ditches. I think Daniel's ... We have a lot of structures and systems now that help us, but back in the early days, it was simply grit. It was the unwillingness. It's the unwillingness to accept it isn't going to work. It was the unwillingness to accept that failure was a possibility. We worked hard. What we lacked in intelligence, what we lacked in experience, we made up for in just grit.

Daniel King: Effort.

Joshua Gagnon: Effort, yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof: When you look at the things that you were doing, Josh, as the lead pastor, you were doing, Dan, as you've morphed into the operations role, as the church has grown, what were some things ... Think about pastoral care. Think about who's building into the volunteers. Was it a flat structure, or were you starting to specialize in roles already, when you were sub-200 in launch days?

Joshua Gagnon: Yeah, I think one of the ways we broke 200 was we started to hand things away and started to create a culture where other people were able to fulfill needs, not just me. I do think, early on, I was fulfilling a lot of the needs, a lot of the roles, and Daniel was counting the giving, and you were actually leading our kids' ministry, which, my goodness, we should ... It should've ended.

Daniel King: That might've been the end, right?

Carey Nieuwhof: The church should've just flopped. That was it.

Daniel King: Right.

Joshua Gagnon: Daniel's a figures, numbers, statistic ... He went to college for economics, for the listeners to understand this personality. We put him in kids. That was all we had, but I think that it was pretty much me doing a lot, and then, as we started to recognize the need for growth, we started to build the organization, the church, in a way where many people were wearing the hats of responsibility.

Daniel King: Yeah, I agree. It's a difficult transition for both sides, I think. As a lead pastor, you're the parent of that child, right? It's the same as releasing your kid to that first day of kindergarten or letting somebody else care for them a little bit. I know we talked tons of times, back then, about how hard it was for you to

sometimes trust other people to do things and make decisions without checking with you, and ... Go ahead.

- Joshua Gagnon: Yeah, and I cared so much about what people thought. I used to hate when I heard people saying stuff like, "Oh, he's too big time for us now," or, "Oh, he doesn't have time," or, "Oh, we have to talk to his assistant." I actually used to feel really, literally insecure, and almost just dumb in a way, if I could even say it, like, "Oh, talk to my assistant." It just felt very awkward to people.
- Joshua Gagnon: I had talked early on with Craig Groeschel, who I know we're both friends with, and he said ... I said, "How do I make this transition?"
- Joshua Gagnon: He said, "Pastor the people at the level they came into the ministry," and so if you were their pastor, and if you did their wedding, you should do their funeral. If you were counseling them, continue to counsel them, but draw a line in the sand.
- Joshua Gagnon: At some point, when anybody comes into the ministry from this point forward, they're under the care of somebody else, but that doesn't mean you can just now say, "Everybody I've been caring for, the heck with you. Find somebody new." No, pastor the people at the level they entered the ministry.
- Carey Nieuwhof: I've heard you say that consistently. I didn't know you got that from Craig. Isn't that interesting? That's good.
- Joshua Gagnon: Well, I've been taking credit for it, as long as I could.
- Daniel King: I'll tell him you said that.
- Carey Nieuwhof: Busted. Did you know ... Daniel, I know you want to chime in here, but just, while I've got Josh-
- Daniel King: Oh, go ahead.
- Carey Nieuwhof: Where was that line? Was that at like 100 people, 150, 200 people, because that's what we're nerding out about on this episode? Do you remember, roughly?
- Joshua Gagnon: I think it was ... I think it needs to probably start around 150. However, it needs to be in position to break 200. You know, 100 people I think is still small enough where people expect, and it also ... I'm having a thought as I'm speaking. It does depend a little bit, Carey, on the size of the room, in the size of the ... the feel of the location, right? If you're in an auditorium with 100 people, and it seats 1000, it feels small enough where the pastor should be able to take care of everything, but once you get into a smaller room, and it feels like something big is happening, it changes the perspective of what people expect, right?

Joshua Gagnon: If you go into an environment in a concert, and it seats 200 people, and it's packed out, you don't necessarily expect to meet the band, but if you go into an auditorium of 1000, and there's 30 people sitting there, you think, there's probably a good chance I'm going to be able to talk to the band and get to know the band.

Daniel King: I'll help them pack up when it's over, right?

Joshua Gagnon: Exactly, so I don't know if it's always just an actual number or more or less the momentum and feel that the location of the church is in the midst of.

Carey Nieuwhof: I think momentum is key, too. Daniel, what would you add to that?

Daniel King: From the opposite perspective, it's hard, too. I grew up in a church world where the senior pastor is always right. That's not spoken out loud. That's not the idea, but just he's this person who, like, I want to be like him. I strive to be like him. They're on a pedestal. I don't think that most senior pastors are intending that. I just think it's the culture of the church world, at least that I grew up in. Carrying that, I guess you might say, baggage or whatever into this world, it's hard to feel like you can make decisions and step in, and not ask permission for everything, and not go into those things. I think those two tensions combine with each other to make it really difficult. I think that's why a lot of churches struggle to get a lot of momentum at that initial point, because nobody really allows for that spreading out wider, so the foundation can be there to grow past that point.

Carey Nieuwhof: I think that's a good point. Sometimes, Daniel, senior pastors will want that kind of authority or respect at every level or even input at every level, but sometimes the staff really feel, because most people come from a small church context, well, of course he has to be involved, of course she has to give her approval. That's not always the case.

Carey Nieuwhof: You said something really interesting, Josh. I mean, kind of sarcastically, or sarcastic isn't the right word, but it's like some people are like, "Oh, look at you now, too big for me. We used to be important to you, but now we're not." Man, I think that's almost a universal thing that people run into. How much pushback did you get, and how did you guys tackle that?

Joshua Gagnon: Yeah, we got quite a bit of pushback. I think every church that faces that decision will always receive pushback. Like you said, I think it's universal. However, this vision has never been for sale, and where we were going to end up has never been a question in our hearts. We have always been very confident that God was going to grow this to the place of influence that it had to be beyond one man's influence. It had to be beyond one man's ability.

Joshua Gagnon: I can remember, early on, hearing those conversations and feeling so horrible that so-and-so might move on, because they can't come over to my house for

dinner. So-and-so wants to meet you in the lobby, and having to say, "Well, they can meet the location pastor. That's their shepherd right now." I can remember feeling so horrible in those moments. However, Carey, it is impossible to get to the next stage of ministry that God's called us in, if I continue to remain the lid that holds us back.

Joshua Gagnon: I think sometimes, almost subconsciously, as leaders, we are the actual lid holding us back from the dream that God's put in our heart. In pushing through those lids, they're going to cause us to step in uncomfortable territory. That was just something I had to be willing to do. Now I look, and I'm thankful. I haven't been to seven or eight of our locations more than one or two times. We have a church that is clearly built on the gifts of men and women that are not me, and that's a wonderful feeling, because there's no greater feeling than knowing that God's Kingdom is much greater than me. I love that feeling. I sincerely love that. Early on, I probably wanted to feel a little bit important. I think now I'm pretty excited when I know that I've had the opportunity to start something that's much larger than my name.

Carey Nieuwhof: Did some of those people, who were upset because they wanted to meet with you personally ... Did they tend to stick around, or did you tend to lose a good chunk of them?

Joshua Gagnon: I think we tended to lose a big chunk of them. Typically, people have an expectation of what they think church should be, and they're going to find what it is they expect church to be. We've become okay with that. We recognize that we haven't been called to reach everybody, but we have been called to reach some. Our staff is very confident. Matter of fact, for instance, we're shutting down one of our Saturday Night Experiences, because at a certain location we have three different days where we do Experiences, and we just feel like that's just hard on teams, and so we said, "Let's shut down one day." We stood up on that Saturday and said, "There's a church up the road that has Saturday nights, and we'd love for you to go there, if you're looking for a Saturday night. We're just not going to do it here any longer."

Joshua Gagnon: We were getting all sorts of people saying, "I can't come any other day. I can't believe you'd shut Saturday." We had to focus on the health of our teams. This goes back to that heart, Carey, where we're just okay understanding that there are going to be decisions that we make, that are not going to be popular, but ultimately they're going to be in the best interest of furthering this vision and truly accomplishing what God's called us to accomplish over the next 30 years.

Joshua Gagnon: We supported the church up the road. We're okay if people move on. We really are. We're okay, because we do believe that these decisions will help us be ultimately more influential for God's Kingdom.

Carey Nieuwhof: Daniel, anything else you can think of, as you look at that first year, as you guys were growing and starting to hit that 200 ceiling that, honestly, 85% of churches

never get through? Even as associate staff or congregational dynamics, what else did you have to push through to get past 200?

Daniel King: Yeah, I think one of the best lessons that I ever learned was one that Pastor taught me and, as far as I know, I think he thought it up in his own head. It was just the idea that some people are pillars and other people aren't. Some people are just-

Joshua Gagnon: Staging.

Daniel King: Not that they're going to be ... not that you're using the people; that's not the correct sense of it, but that some people just aren't going to be there forever. You put up the staging around the house, so that you can reach the higher level to put the roof on, but then the staging comes down, once the roof is on. It doesn't stay there permanently. It's the same idea with some people. You just have to be okay with the fact that sometimes some people are going to leave in those seasons.

Daniel King: It feels so personal in the moment. It feels like they're rejecting you or him or whoever. It feels like they're rejecting the person, but they're really not. There's some people who just ... They really like 80 person churches, and so, when you get past 80 people, guess what? They're going to go look for the next church that's not 80 people yet, because that's what they enjoy.

Joshua Gagnon: Yeah, and I would say that I did not come up with that, Carey. That's actually a former guest, Matt Keller.

Daniel King: Oh, yeah, I know Matt.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah.

Joshua Gagnon: Yeah, so that's actually.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's funny.

Joshua Gagnon: I haven't come up with anything. That's what I'm trying to explain to people.

Carey Nieuwhof: I read a chapter from a future book of yours. You've got a few ideas. You've got a few ideas, my friend.

Joshua Gagnon: Thank you. What you said, 85% of churches never break this 200 barrier, and man, it just ... What popped out to me was maybe it's because we're not willing to face the pain that we're talking about right now, in order to overcome that 200 barrier, because what we're talking about is a shift in mentality. We're talking about a shift in thinking, a shift in the church's culture, a shift in influence. We're talking, at that number, there's a lot of changes that have to take place. If 85% of churches can't break 200, it could be because we just don't

know how or aren't willing to face the pain that it takes to culturally, systematically change the organization, in order to overcome that number.

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh, I think that's a great insight, Josh. It is painful. I mean, I remember, and regular listeners will know I've talked about that before, about my own journey. It's really hard, because you have to be misunderstood. To be fair to the people in your church, you said something like ... Daniel, you said, hey, if they are used to a church of 80 people, they're going to go find a church of 80 people, and when you're 160 or 250, or whatever it is, you don't feel like home anymore.

Carey Nieuwhof: The reality is, if 85% of churches are 200 people or less, then the vast majority of people, who come from another church, are not going to have any idea. You think about those first 200 people. They had no idea what a church of a thousand felt like, or a church of 4000 over nine, ten, locations in multiple states. It's not fair, as a visionary, to sometimes expect them to get that intuitively. Of course, they're not going to get that.

Joshua Gagnon: Absolutely.

Carey Nieuwhof: That gives you empathy for people, too, right? How did you bring ... because you didn't lose everybody. How did you bring, let's say I'm going to argue, the majority of people with you, past that 200 barrier? What did you do to make sure not everybody left.

Joshua Gagnon: Yeah, clearly, as you said, a large majority did come along for the journey. We just continued to keep the why out in front of people. I continued to explain to somebody, when they would say, "Can I have coffee with you? Can we meet for coffee?" I would keep the why out in front. Instead of saying, "Speak to my assistant," I would say, "Man, I would love to do that. However, we have a location pastor at this location, that we have empowered to have those meetings, because it is impossible for me to be able to have coffee with everybody here, and we believe that we're going to reach a lot more people, allowing many more people to be the shepherds, to be the pastors, to be the leaders at this location." We kept the why out.

Joshua Gagnon: One of the things I think we've done well, maybe you would agree, Daniel, is we keep the why out in front of what it is we do. We don't just make decisions that come without reasoning. We make sure that, whenever we make a decision, we teach the why. For instance, most of our locations, except one of them, are video all weekend long, 100% video teaching. Well, that's not too popular at the beginning, especially in an unchurched region.

Joshua Gagnon: The why is, and I'm not saying this ... I'm using this as an example, Carey. The why, the reason people have bought into it, is because I stand up and I say, "If it takes me 15 minutes to write a message, we have 10 locations. If you do 10 times 15 hours, if every location pastor wrote a message, that's 150 hours. It could take me, alone, 15 hours. Do you realize, people, we've just freed up this

many more ministry hours to reach our communities?” People start rallying around the what? The why. This is for us to free up, to steward, God's money to reach more people.

Joshua Gagnon: If we just said we do video because we like it, I'm not sure it would go over as well, but as soon as you teach the why, people rally around it. Early on, I think we kept the people with us, and we have continued to break 200 at all of our locations. I believe it's because people understand there's a why behind what it is we do. There's a why behind me not meeting with Pastor Josh. There's a why behind him never being here. There's a why behind it.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, anything else on that, Daniel?

Daniel King: No, I think that's totally true. As he's talking, I'm thinking of dozens of examples, of times of just things that we did that, on the surface, most people maybe wouldn't like or wouldn't initially choose as their preference. I think even when we did the first multi-site location, it was like ... It wasn't benefiting, directly, anybody in the room, because we launched an hour away. The first location was an hour away, so it's not like, oh, this is going to be closer to my house, or anything along those lines. It goes back to that same thing, like, no, why? Because we have to reach more people. We have to keep growing.

Joshua Gagnon: It's not optional.

Daniel King: We can't just stay in this spot. There's no like, ah, it's okay. We'll just settle here. We'll be comfortable, and we'll grow 20 people a year, and eventually we'll be able to buy a building and grow a couple hundred more. No, that's not an option. We can't be okay with that. The why is there are more people who need to hear about it, and this is a place we can go reach more people.

Joshua Gagnon: Yeah, I decided early on, Carey, that I would rather fail than never go after what I believed I was created to do. I decided early on that I would rather go back to zero and do it again, rather than pastor a church of 150 people the rest of my life. Now, not that that's bad, Carey. We understand that, but I felt like I was called to launch locations and start up locations personally. I may fail in trying, but not trying and giving it all I had to get there wasn't an option.

Carey Nieuwhof: One of my mentors in the early days, especially ... “I don't know if this is going to work, guys, but we're going to go broke trying. If we go broke, we're going to go broke trying.” People get that. They like, you know, when you start with six people, 14 people, 23 people in the original churches I was called to serve, they're like, “We're going to go broke anyway, so we might as well go broke trying,” right?

Daniel King: Yep, yep.

Carey Nieuwhof: It's amazing what God can do with that. It's just outstanding.

Joshua Gagnon: That's still our mentality. That's still what we say today. We're not going to become fat and slow. We're going to stay skinny and quick.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's good. Now, I'm going to get to multi-site in a moment, because I really want to drill down on how you launch locations at 200 and above, 200, and that kind of thing, but you all know, in the material that we're teaching in the Breaking 200 course, we have a lot of alumni, who are saying, "Dude, these things work at 400, 600, 800, 1000, some of the principles in there," because there are very clear barriers that ... 200's a big one, pastoral care, access to the pastor, but then, what are some of the ones that started to emerge at 400, 600, 800, 1000, that you had to navigate, as well?

Daniel King: Yeah, I think for me, personally, I would say it's the same problems over and over, but it's passed down a layer, or passed down a level of leadership, right? The same problem that he described of can I delegate this to someone else? Can I trust this to someone else? Can I train someone else to do it 80% or 90% as good as I'm doing it? It's the same issue, except now, instead of him teaching me, it's can I teach somebody else? That might get you to four or five hundred then.

Daniel King: Then, can I teach that person to be able to teach somebody else? That might be what it takes to get to a thousand. The issues don't change, right? The scale changes, but it ultimately all comes down to can we develop another set of leaders, who can contain the same DNA, who can pass it on even further, so that more people can be cared for, because one person's capacity is still only that 50 or 80 or 100, whatever it is, depending on the person, that they can care for. Every time you want to add 100, that's another leader you had to develop, or that's another two leaders you had to develop. I think that's really been our experience is a location can hit that number, our total collective of all our locations can hit another number, only when we've added another layer of leadership beyond.

Carey Nieuwhof: Good insight. Yeah, it just pushes deeper, and I think the senior leader is the first one to feel that delegation pressure, because with the bigger crowd comes higher expectations on the message. Pastoral care has to scale out. Did you guys ... because I've referenced it, but we haven't really gone there. What was your model for pastoral care, other than Pastor Josh goes to visit all the people? How did you handle that.

Daniel King: Yeah, I think one of the best decisions we ever made, or that Pastor ever really made, was before ... When we had one location, we implemented a location pastor, even before we launched. It was just like, this is who we're going to become.

Joshua Gagnon: We launched in March, and October 27th of that year, I put in a location pastor, who was the shepherd of that location, because I knew we were going to be launching locations, and I wanted to create a culture and a DNA that our first

location could recreate somewhere else. Just to give a timeline, we launched in March, and I was really only the “shepherd” of that location until October. From October on, the location pastor was the shepherd.

Carey Nieuwhof: Six months, so in your model at that time or today, does the campus pastor do the pastoral care? Do groups do pastoral care? How does that work?

Joshua Gagnon: Yeah, we have groups that we really push people into, and we do believe that care happens in those groups. It depends on the size of the location, and so smaller locations, that location pastor still does a lot of the pastoral care. When a location hits/breaks 200 or starts hitting up at 400, 600, or bigger, you have to start to give away a lot of that, those care responsibilities to ... whether that's other staff members or, of course, group leaders.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, yeah, so again that scales out. Josh, from your perspective, what were some of the barriers that you ran into, as the senior leader, at say 400, 600, 800? Do you remember?

Joshua Gagnon: Yeah, I think it's still the same barriers I run into today, which is just, what's next? How do I lead at a level I've never led at before? It feels like I am always leading in a place I've never been, and everybody expects me to have answers to grounds I've never covered. I've always been playing catch-up. I'm not sure that really much has changed. I think it's been easy for me to hand things away, because personality wise, I enjoy watching those that I'm leading take on responsibility.

Joshua Gagnon: One of the things that I'm sure we'll get into is multi-site, where I would say, that adds a whole other layer of complications and difficulties, because now you're talking about having to keep culture and DNA across many different venues. I would say that that's been one of the hardest, or is probably the hardest-

Daniel King: The hardest, mm-hmm (affirmative).

Joshua Gagnon: The hardest thing that we face, and even me, myself, as a leader, is making sure that our locations are living within the culture and DNA envisioned of Next Level Church.

Daniel King: Yeah, I totally agree with that. I think there's many different models of multi-site, not to jump the gun. There's many different models, and sometimes it's more of an overflow seating issue, right? You're staying around the same large city or the same large community. For us, we're a three-hour plane ride from one of our locations, but even before that, we're a four-hour drive to our location in New York, or a two-hour drive to this location.

Daniel King: We don't have locations where it's 15-20 minutes, everybody can pop into the same office every day. That's been true since our third or fourth location. We

were always at a distance, right? We've always had to figure out, and I think are still figuring out, to some extent, but always had to continually get better at creating culture, maintaining culture, monitoring culture, teaching culture, whether that's a system, whether that's a person, whether that. There's many ways of going about it, and it's a combination of all of those things, really to do it well.

Daniel King: How do we keep the DNA, so that if you go to the location that's four hours from this location, it feels the exact same? You're experiencing the same love. You're experiencing the same excellence. You're experiencing the same whatever it is that you value.

Carey Nieuwhof: I feel like you guys just invited yourself back for another hour-long drill down on that point alone, because that is massive. Multi-site churches, multi-campus churches really struggle with that. I mean, I get that. We're only at three locations. I get it. You're trying to replicate.

Carey Nieuwhof: Again, people that you're attracting at your new location have old reference points for what church is, and they're not yours. However, the focus of this podcast is on smaller church leaders, who are trying to break 200, 500, so I want to ... That is such a huge flag, but I want to switch gears and talk about launching locations that you know, or hope, are going to be at 100, or 200 rather, 200 or above. Why do you pick that number, first of all?

Joshua Gagnon: Yeah, we've had locations that have been under 200 people, and we found it difficult to create the same level of excellence that we required in NLC Kids, in our kids' ministry, or even the bands, to recreate the same level of excellence that we expect on stage. We felt like that number, 200, gives us enough critical mass, and really enough people serving and enough talent to pull from that we're able to do what Next Level Church does. It was difficult for us to have a location at 1000 and a location at 50 and expect them to do the same things. However, 200 and 1000, you can do the same thing. It's just going to be on a small-

Daniel King: Less times, yeah.

Joshua Gagnon: Yeah, less times, exactly.

Carey Nieuwhof: Is that an attendance number, including men, women, children, volunteers, that sort of a ...?

Joshua Gagnon: Yeah.

Daniel King: Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, all right.

Joshua Gagnon: Total number, total number.

Carey Nieuwhof: Once you have a total number of 200 people in the building on a Sunday morning, it starts to feel viable for you guys.

Joshua Gagnon: It starts to feel like we can now create an atmosphere that we feel like is best for people to step in and engage what it is we're trying to present.

Daniel King: Yeah, we found ourselves feeling like we were asking something that was almost unfair, like you're going to a location pastor and saying, for example, "The standard is you have this certain musicians. All these slots have to be filled. You have to have these certain classrooms operating the kids." We're saying, "You have to have that. You don't have it. You have to have it. You have to have it. You have to have it," and you just ... It's hard to have 50 people serving, if you only have 80 people. It just doesn't work that well. We just had to come up with a number that was essentially a fair expectation to be able to put on people.

Carey Nieuwhof: You raise this, because this is huge, whether you're a single site, multi-site. You can play this out at launching new locations now, expanding, adding services, or even go back to when you had 30 or 40 people in that giant, what probably felt like a mausoleum some Sundays. Developing volunteers, developing leaders, is such a huge part of doing what you do, and what every church does. What have been some keys to you in, let's say, a brand new location that doesn't have a lot of momentum, because none of them tend to, when you're launching them, or even in those early days of saying, "God gave us the leaders that we need." How do you find them? How do you deploy them? How do you motivate them?

Joshua Gagnon: Yeah, finding them is always very difficult. We make sure that we ... We make hard asks. We're always trying to identify ... Everybody in our leadership chain knows that they have to be mentoring or developing one person. Daniel's done a great job with his team, that building volunteer videos, volunteer headquarters, volunteer check-in, that any church of any size could do, and they could do it well. I'll let Daniel take this question, and maybe talk a little bit about our volunteer training, and the stuff you've worked on hard to keep that culture.

Daniel King: Yeah, I think the heartbeat behind it, really, for us ... The original idea came from just the culture that we live in. It's really hard. I mean, I'm sure we've all tried it before. Probably everybody listening has tried to organize a ... We're going to have Saturday morning volunteer training for our kids' ministry. You're telling people three weeks ahead, and you're blocking it out, and you're catering in bagels, and you're doing all this. It's a big deal. You're putting all this work into getting people there, to motivate them, to making the content good, and then you're not just going to have them come for 15 minutes. You're putting all that work in, so you're going to be there for two or three hours.

Daniel King: We asked ourselves one time, after all that work and all those resources, what are the people actually going to remember? Maybe a couple of things, two or three things, maybe. We're asking them to sit there for three hours. We're playing all these games. We're doing all these things, and we're getting probably 40% of people to show up, and then you've got to ask yourself what to do with the rest of them.

Daniel King: That's really the idea where the video teaching/training came from. What we've done, instead, is create these three-minute, five-minute, quick videos that people can go through on their own. When they see the video, they answer a quick question. They're just easy questions that just verifies they watched it. Then it shoots that leader an email and says, "Hey, so-and-so's completed the training. Now they're eligible to serve." That's allowed us to get 99% compliance, instead of a 40% compliance, with less effort, less energy, less resources.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's really good, and more and more people are moving into that, through platforms like TrainedUp or ones that they develop themselves, which is good. How do you find your volunteers? When you're starting out in a location, or even at the beginning, 30 or 40 people there, it's like, okay, I think you're a senior leader. How do you even spot the talent?

Daniel King: Yeah, I think one of the big things for us is we've created a culture where it's almost like if you're not serving, you're not in a group, you're not doing those things, you almost, not in an awkward way, but you almost feel a little bit out of place. It's almost like it's just ... It's what everybody's doing. It's the expectation that's there.

Carey Nieuwhof: What are you doing here if you're not serving, right?

Daniel King: Yeah, yeah, so even in like our ... We don't have formal membership, but even when we say if you'd like to partner with us, we don't say, "Sign this paper." We don't say, "Put your name on a roll." We say, "People who are partnering with us, these are the things they're doing. They're serving. They're in a group. They're giving. They're attending regularly. That's what makes you a part of this church." If you believe in the vision, that's how you show that you believe in it. It's not by checking a box or being on a roll sheet.

Joshua Gagnon: Yeah, and I think, practically speaking, Carey, because I think sometimes we can talk too-

Daniel King: Oversimplify.

Joshua Gagnon: Yeah, or talk too broad even, I think. We have something we call Next, if we're just practically speaking. That is huge for us. It's a booklet. It happens every other month, that we encourage everybody who's a first-time guest at Next Level Church to get into next. The first step is hand in a Connect Card. If you

hand in your Connect Card, we're going to donate \$5 on behalf of your Connect Card to Compassion. Every single guest, we donate \$5 to Compassion, which now, for this year, becomes thousands and thousands of dollars, that we show on the screen, that we've given in honor of first-time guests. Why don't you be one of those guests?

Joshua Gagnon: The next thing that happens is immediately you're contacted and asked to go to Next, by the location pastor, after you receive a text message. This Next Class, Carey, is really where the team has done an amazing job. You leave there feeling like you should serve. If you give correct on ramps, leaders will be found. The problem isn't ... If there's a leader worthy of being a leader at your church, just give an on ramp. Leaders will be ... You'll notice leaders, as long as you have on ramps for them to be noticed. Leaders, who are true leaders that are going to change an organization, are rarely going to sit in the shadows when there's plenty of on ramps for them to get involved in. That's practically speaking, one of the things that our team does really well.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's super helpful. You talked about hard asks. Does that mean personally? You just see somebody who's leading in the community, and you're like, "Hey Daniel, hey Carey, I need you in"? How do you do that?

Joshua Gagnon: Yeah, I've gone to coffee shops, and the person who keeps waiting on me every day is awesome, and I'll ask, "Will you be our guest service lead?" I'll ask anybody like that to step in, that I notice has a gifting, even if they're not in the church. For us, we just say, hey listen, that's somebody that we could plug in.

Joshua Gagnon: At Next Level Church, we may be a little bit different than some of the listeners, but I think we all agree on the essential thing, which is Jesus. You can serve at Next Level Church without being a believer. That's just one of the ways that we believe that we should move forward. We let people serve, who don't believe, because we believe eventually, while serving, they will believe. We ask anybody. We ask anybody and all over the place with any sort of potential to join the team, step in, and make a difference.

Daniel King: Yeah, and I think it's critical that we have really taught our location pastors, and they do a great job, now, of it. From day one, from launch moment on, you're looking for that. I think a lot of people tend to make the mistake of launch day is so fun. It's so exciting. We've got this crowd, and everything, but we're always thinking like, what about the next week? What about three weeks from then? What about Easter? What about the next big thing that's coming up?

Daniel King: From day one, it's like, you see somebody. They've got a great smile. Go up to them and say, "Hey, you've got a great smile. Would you mind coming early next week, and just shadow and see if guest services fits you?" "Hey, you're doing a great job with your kids," as they're just walking to check their kids in. "You look like you love kids. Do you love kids? Would you be willing to talk

about serving in Kids?" From the moment that the doors open of that location, we have to immediately be plugging people in.

Carey Nieuwhof: It's not just the broadcast announcement. Hey, we need more volunteers! It's a whole lot of personal, look them in the eye, put your hand on their shoulder, and invite them in.

Daniel King: Yeah, broadcast announcement has a chance to get maybe 10 or 20 people in bulk, but the stick percentage is extremely low from that. The personal ask, obviously you're only going to get one person at a time doing it that way, but I think you've got a 70-80% chance of that person finding the right fit and sticking with it.

Carey Nieuwhof: Totally agree.

Carey Nieuwhof: For your locations, what are some keys to helping them get above 200? You talked about some that maybe launch with 50 or 100, or you're launching a new location. You're like, yeah, we've just got to hit that 200 level. What are some keys that help you get there?

Joshua Gagnon: I think launching big is a large key, to the church planters that are listening. We spend a good amount of money in marketing. Not only that, marketing the first weekend but, like Daniel said, if our marketing budget, and I'm just going to throw out a number, was \$10,000, we wouldn't spend \$10,000 on week one. We may spend \$6000 on week one, and \$4000 of it on the rest of the month after week one, because it's very important to keep the pedal to the metal. It's very important to make a presence in a community much longer than one week. I think launching big is definitely something that we feel is very, very important, in order to stay over 200 after a launch.

Daniel King: Yeah, I think there's a distinction about what launching big means, too. I think it's important that you launch big with people who can actually come back. I think that sometimes there's a tendency, and I've even heard people get this coaching before of like, "Invite all your friends from out of town to come," like, "Just fill the room on launch day. Ask all the people who've helped you. Do anything you can to make the room feel full on launch day." I don't ... I understand the idea. You want it to feel big, and you want it to feel exciting, but I think you're also ... That first day is setting the expectation of what is good for the second week.

Daniel King: What ends up happening is you get 200 people, but only 100 of them actually have a realistic chance of coming back the next week, and so the momentum is lost. You feel this sense of disappointment. I would rather launch with 150, with 125 of them able to potentially come back the next week versus launch with 200, but only 50 of them with a chance to come back the next week, because the momentum, the energy, that goes with that, the way you're able to build, is so much stronger.

Joshua Gagnon: Yeah, and from that point on, Carey, after we launch, if you drop down to, say, 100-150, well we just continue to do the same things that we've always done, which is focus on health. We have gauges that all of our location pastors look at. We have a website that was built with each gauge. One is attendance.

Daniel King: Kids.

Joshua Gagnon: Kids' groups.

Daniel King: Giving.

Joshua Gagnon: Giving.

Daniel King: Yep, culture.

Joshua Gagnon: Serving.

Daniel King: Yep.

Joshua Gagnon: There's these gauges, and our location pastors go to this website. They put in all the different metrics in these gauges, which will show green, yellow, or red. We just teach our location pastors that if we can stay green in each of these gauged areas, that a car drives best when the gauges are healthy. If we can stay healthy, if we can stay healthy, we're going to grow.

Joshua Gagnon: Really, nothing changes under 200. We just believe that if we continue to focus on the correct gauges, and healthiness in each of these gauges, eventually it will grow. Of course, little things like making sure you're shrinking rooms, so that it's not awkward for people to be sitting in a room, making sure that you're keeping the why out in front of people.

Daniel King: Yeah, I think one thing you can't discount, too, is the idea that what got you here is what's going to get you to the next place. We teach our location pastors like, hey, day one, I was there. Pastor Josh was driving around in the middle of the night, dropping yard signs. Just because now we have more resources, just because now we have the opportunity to what we were hoping to launch with a hundred then, we're hoping to launch with two or three hundred now, doesn't mean that we're any less responsible for putting in the same amount of effort, and digging that same ditch, and putting in the same work, and so the same grit, the same guerrilla marketing, the same grind it out that we talked about at the beginning of this recording is the same thing we expect now. Keep doing the same things.

Carey Nieuwhof: One of the things, Josh, that you and I have talked about when we've gotten together is, and maybe this was a temporary strategy along the way, but I just, I want to surface it. You said, sometimes you'll swap out campus pastors, like if you've got a very small location, you need someone with that relational, maybe

even pastoral heart, and again you can do that, at 50, 75, 100 people, but then, I don't know whether it's 200 or 400, you need someone who's maybe a little more administrative, who thinks in systems. Do you still do that? Have you done that? Can you speak into the gift mix that helps provide the right leadership at the right level?

Joshua Gagnon: Yeah, we have done that, and we do still do that. The reality is to lead a location of 500 people is a different gift setting than leading a location at 150 people. To lead a location at 150 people, you're going to need, in our model, to be more of an entrepreneur. You're going to need to think like someone who starts things. You're going to need to be type A, aggressive, relentless, thinking about how to scale the organization, in order to grow to a certain level.

Joshua Gagnon: When you get to about 500 people, or maybe 400 people, really you need a team builder. You need somebody who just systematically thinks about teams and delegation. Now, that's not saying that there aren't personalities or people that have both of those gift settings, but I've recognized, in leadership, sometimes we're asking somebody to do something they literally are not wired to do.

Joshua Gagnon: I want you to think about how it is we can grow this location from 150 to 200. There are some people who just are not wired at starting businesses or building businesses. They're more wired towards caring for the business that's already been built, just talking in business sense. Now, when we go to the church world, we expect people to be able to build something, from nothing into something, but they don't have the gift setting that it takes to be someone who builds something from nothing. However, they may be amazing at continuing a legacy that was already started. Neither is better. Neither is worse, but different personality traits. I think, one of the things that is very important for us, and we're always hiring location pastors, is what size is this location. Along with that size, we'll determine the gifts of the leader we need.

Carey Nieuwhof: How have you ... I think that's a really good insight, and sometimes you'll swap them out. It's like, well, now, campus number five is 500 people. It's time for a new leader, and we'll send campus pastor number five to campus number 10 or whatever. Both of you have stayed in pretty consistent roles over the years, so what have been some keys ... We've touched on it a little bit, but I just wonder if there's more there, for you to say, "Yeah, I was Mr. Entrepreneurial, knew everyone by name, go out, put lawn signs on before Easter, myself," but you've had to pivot. What are some of the key pivots you've had to make?

Joshua Gagnon: Yeah, one of my ... My gifting really isn't coming over to your home and having dinner every night. That's just not my gifting or my desire.

Carey Nieuwhof: You don't have the gift of food, like eating?

Joshua Gagnon: Oh, trust me, I have the gift of food. I just don't have the gift of conversation. For me, early on, I was actually acting more in gifts I didn't have than now. I would say, now I'm operating more in my natural giftings. Early on, I had to compensate for my weaknesses, in order to get to my strengths.

Joshua Gagnon: Instead of having to start at my strengths and build from there, I started at my weaknesses, so I could get to what I was actually gifted at. I'm better in the seat I'm in now than probably any other seat I've ever been in, because I'm able to lead leaders. I'm able to help our teams. I'm able to cast a vision. I communicate on the weekends. I do meet with, of course, Next Level Church people, but they're people that I have relationships with, people that I feel like are doing ... are in the same lane as me. People that I grow with, and they grow with me. I would say, I don't know if you'd agree, Daniel, right now, I'm probably most comfortable with where I'm at.

Daniel King: Yeah, I agree, and I think you've allowed me to do that in a ... We've structured our leadership structure around who we have, not around-

Joshua Gagnon: Yeah, how many times have I asked you, "Do you want a different job?"

Daniel King: Yeah, I mean, it's very clear. It's like, what are you passionate about? What are you good at? Okay, let's build structure around that, not, hey, this is what every other church org chart looks like. We don't even have an org chart on paper, because you can't even really draw it. It's just ... We split up what most churches would call an executive pastor, just for one example.

Joshua Gagnon: You want to hear what it is, Carey?

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, yeah, I do.

Joshua Gagnon: You'll like this. You know Roman?

Carey Nieuwhof: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Joshua Gagnon: Roman handles everything with a soul. Daniel handles everything without a soul.

Carey Nieuwhof: You don't want to put that on paper in the church. Really, you really don't, soulless.

Daniel King: That's good description, yeah.

Joshua Gagnon: That's good for the souls, by the way.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's awesome.

Daniel King: Yeah, and I think that's a perfect example, though, of just allowing what people are good at, and which usually goes with what they enjoy doing, and building the organization around that.

Joshua Gagnon: But early on, you were willing to do whatever it took for us to break growth barriers.

Daniel King: Yeah, there's a difference between willing, and there's a season where willing's required. Even with our location pastors, sometimes, when a location first launches, like, guess what? You might have to run students, or you might have to run kids or something for a season. There's willing, and then that's not ideal for the long run, and so we try to, hopefully, get as close to ideal as we can, as fast as we can.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, and I think the point is flexibility, and if you want to keep people, as the organization grows, people have to grow. You've got to move them into a place where it's like, well ... I think you're right. You get to specialize more. Josh, you know, when you were saying that, I think that's probably true. I'm more of a visionary, more of a 30,000 foot person, but when our churches were small, I mean, I did the hospital visitation. I did the hustle. I went to all the meals. I did all that stuff, because that's what you need at that stage, but what got you there won't get you beyond it, right? That's not going to scale to 600. It's not going to help you at a thousand.

Carey Nieuwhof: Again, the goal is, if you have an opportunity with your life to reach a thousand people, why would you not take it? If you have an opportunity to reach 5000, why would you not take it? If God has given you that ability, the mission of the church is endless.

Joshua Gagnon: Yeah, the question to always ask is what is best for the church that I'm leading in now?

Carey Nieuwhof: Right.

Joshua Gagnon: What's best? You find some leaders that are starting off today, and they're expecting to not have to meet with people, and they're a church plant, and they're hoping they don't have to meet with people, because Craig Groeschel doesn't do a lot of visits, or Carey Nieuwhof doesn't do a lot of hospital visits, and I want to structure my leadership that way. I would say, "Well, you're going to probably never get to the point where that's the case. You have to do what the church needs you to do now." The church needed me to do visits in the hospital when we started, when we were 100 people, when we were 150, but, Carey, the church needed me to stop doing those, and to hand those away, in order for us to break 200.

Joshua Gagnon: Now, even in this season, I went in to look at our new website that's coming out. The team asked me today, "Can you walk through it?" I looked through it

real quick. They said, "What do you think?" I said, "I think I hired the right people, so what do you think?" That was my question.

Joshua Gagnon: What the church needs from me now is to continue to hand more and more and more off to people who I've hired and trusted more with those things. I think that's a wonderful question for every leader to ask. What is best right now, and how am I living in what's best right now, preparing for what's going to be best later?

Carey Nieuwhof: Good. Guys, this has been gold, really helpful. Thanks for opening your playbooks. Anything else you want to share before we wrap up today? Anything else on your mind that it's like, wish we would've covered that?

Joshua Gagnon: No, just my heartbeat is always faithfulness, Carey. I think of all the church leaders, and I mean, there's very few platforms that are larger than the one God's given you, and this amazing podcast that reaches literally hundreds of thousands of people. I can't help but think of all these church leaders that are under so much pressure to break certain numbers, and to be a certain person, and they're always comparing themselves, like I often find myself.

Joshua Gagnon: Carey, I think we would be wise just to simply say, be faithful with where God's called you. You may be at 100 people, and you may feel called to more. It doesn't mean it's not going to happen, because it hasn't happened yet. God can do, in a moment, what a man would take a lifetime in trying to break doors down to accomplish. I think staying faithful ... One more thing, Carey. I think you'd agree. Man, there is nothing to be ashamed about using your calling and gifting at reaching and leading 100 people.

Carey Nieuwhof: Nope.

Joshua Gagnon: If that's the season someone's in, praise God for that pastor right now, who's faithful at 100 people, believing for more, because some days it's a little easier to be faithful with 1000 people than it is 100 people. Praise God for the leaders that are listening to this podcast, wanting to grow, but yet, not throwing in the towel, because they haven't seen what they've hoped to see yet.

Carey Nieuwhof: Really well said, really well said, and I agree. I think there's great honor in leading. If you're leading 10 people, 100 people, it's not a comparison game. It's a question of how are you going to leverage the mission that God has given you.

Joshua Gagnon: Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof: At the end of the day, I think we all have a level. My job is to fully obey God and trust Him with the consequences.

Joshua Gagnon: Amen.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's not new with me. That's Charles Stanley, by the way, if you were wondering.

Joshua Gagnon: Your material on the Breaking 200 and the barriers, by the way, I just want to say, is great. We did that for all of our location pastors, and our locations are over 200. You had mentioned something that barriers ... This material meets all needs. I just want to confirm that. Our locations are 400, 800, 1000. The principles are golden, no matter what the size of the church. We played that for all of our location pastors and watched the videos, and it was wonderful.

Carey Nieuwhof: I appreciate you saying that. You were actually one of the first people to give me that feedback. I remember, you texted me, and you said, "Hey, man, this is working for 600, 800." I think board governance, for example, which is not a major issue for you guys, but can be for a lot of people, that really shows up at four to six hundred. Daniel, what you were talking about, like the first thing is, okay, it's got to get off the lead pastor's table, but then maybe at 400, 600, 800, it has to come off your plate, and then off the next, like it's all those layers in, that you run into leadership development issues. Daniel, anything on your heart, your mind, that you would like to leave leaders with, or that we didn't cover?

Daniel King: No, I appreciate you having me on. Just thank you for everything you've done for us. Appreciate you and Jeff and all the guys up there having us up for visits and always being available for phone calls, wisdom. We've learned so much from you guys, and the issues you guys are facing in Canada, even culturally, before they sometimes make their way down to the States, and just appreciate your help.

Carey Nieuwhof: You guys have been amazing friends to us, and to me. It's funny, as we were recording this, I'm like, "I'm going to send Jeff Brodie an early copy of this, the audio for this." He would've loved this conversation. Guys, people are going to want to know more. First of all, Josh, tell them about your podcast, which is growing every month. It's a great podcast. I'm a subscriber, and then where they can find Next Level Church online.

Joshua Gagnon: Yeah, Joshua Gagnon Leadership Podcast is a podcast where we talk a lot about what we're talking about right now, just real raw, authentic conversations on how to do church in real time. Yeah, so it's been fun. Next Level Church is just nextlevel.church, and just honored to do life. If anybody needs anything from us, we're always here, as always, and excited, excited to continue to push the ball downfield and see lives changed.

Carey Nieuwhof: As I've said more than once, if you guys are ever in New England, you've got to drop by Next Level's broadcast location, because it's amazing. I think, is it 14,000 square feet? Is that it?

Joshua Gagnon: Yeah, yep.

Daniel King: Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof: And all that God has done-

Joshua Gagnon: It's our smallest.

Carey Nieuwhof: No, all God has done through you and through Vision, and I mean, because you think of megachurch, and you're like, "Oh, yeah, it's some big stadium and 10 million square feet." Nope, this is a converted garage, like mechanic's garage, that you guys have turned into a hub for ministry, that's transforming a whole region of the country and beyond. Kudos to you. Thanks for your faithfulness over the years.

Joshua Gagnon: We like to think we make megachurch available for anybody.

Carey Nieuwhof: That is an awesome place, so I know we're all living in a world ... We're all living in our universe, but I love how you have stewarded what God has given you. It's inspiring to me and anybody who's visited you guys. Thank you so much. Really appreciate it, guys.

Joshua Gagnon: Take care.

Daniel King: Thank you.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's so honest and so real, isn't it, man? I hope that encouraged you. I really, really do. Well, thousands of pastors have experienced the same problem. If that is your issue, whether it's 75 people, 150, 250, 500, you can't get past, it just doesn't have to be that way. Just like I said in the interview, Josh approached me, and he said, "Hey, man, we've used that course for all of our campuses. It's helping."

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Carey Nieuwhof: Well, I really hope this has helped you guys. We're back next Tuesday with a fresh episode. Adam Hamilton is my guest. Thank you so much for listening. I hope our time together today has helped you lead like never before.

Announcer: You've been listening to the Carey Nieuwhof Leadership Podcast. Join us next time for more insights on leadership, change, and personal growth, to help you lead like never before.