

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

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, hey everybody, and welcome to episode 239 of the podcast. My name is Carey Nieuwhof, and I hope our time together today helps you lead like never before. Well, I hope your new year is off to a great start, and thank you for so many of you making us a part of this, and I want to say a particular thank you to those of you who share. I mean, it's fun to listen to these things while you're running, making dinner, on a commute, on a long trip, wherever you happen to listen to your podcast, but it's another thing to share them with your team, and to share them with your friends.

Carey Nieuwhof: So, for all of you who are sharing on social, I just wanna say thank you. Thank you so much for getting the word out. Really helps us do what we do, and do it better. This is gonna be, I hope, the best year yet for the podcast, and on that note, I think you're gonna love today's guest. A lot of you have heard of him. He is a bestselling author, and he's written books like *The Energy Bus*, *The Carpenter*, *Training Camp*.

Carey Nieuwhof: He works with organizations like the LA Dodgers, Dell, Southwest Airlines, The LA Clippers, The Miami Heat. With major banks, with even West Point Academy, and what does Jon Gordon do? He talks to them about positivity, and makes a huge difference in their life; in corporate culture, in team culture, and Jon sat down with me to talk about just positivity generally. He's got a powerful story, and see if this ever hit you as a leader. You know, you come home, you just kinda dump when you come home? I am guilty as charged.

Carey Nieuwhof: More so in the past than in the present, but still, sometimes, you know, I can be that guy, and when Jon was 29, his wife said, "Listen, I love you, but I cannot live my life with a guy who complains all the time." And totally set him on his heels. He became about, like, positive things. We reach a really fun moment in the interview where he says, "Why are you talking so much about negativity?" And I thought, "You know what? It's 'cause there's a lot of church leaders listening, and a lot of business leaders listening, and what they deal with is negativity all day long."

Carey Nieuwhof: So, anyway, I think you're gonna love this interview. And, hey, speaking of negativity and frustration, do you ever find yourself short-staffed? I think one of the areas that is chronically understaffed in the church today is in the area of media development. I mean, there's all the things you need to do, but then there's all the things you should do, and you know what the reality is for most churches? They're just understaffed. Either no staff, or not enough. Well, what if there was a cloud-based solution that didn't cost you a fraction, even, of what a regular staff member would?

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, if you haven't done it yet, check out Pro Media Fire. You can find them at [promediafire.com](http://promediafire.com) and make sure you go to [promediafire.com/carey](http://promediafire.com/carey) where there are some special savings. So, here's the deal. So many leaders just struggle with graphic support, and so Pro Media Fire has unlimited graphic design services, unlimited custom church videos, for a flat monthly fee that, again, is a fraction of what you would pay for a staff team member.

Carey Nieuwhof: Now, collectively, this creative team has over 30 years combined experience, and they've got a limited launch special to listeners of this podcast. 10% off all plans for life, and 40% off for the media bundle for life, with unlimited graphic design and video services. So, head on over today to [promediafire.com/carey](http://promediafire.com/carey) and another question for you before we jump into the interview, it's simply this: how are those new year's resolutions going?

Carey Nieuwhof: You know what? For a lot of us, by this point, it's like, "Well, not particularly well." And I'm not just talking about diet, or losing weight, but you know how this was gonna be the year where you were gonna crush your goals? This was gonna be the year where everything was gonna be different, and it's feeling really the same? Well, I've got good news for you. Thousands of leaders, now, have been helped by The High Impact Leader Course, which I do, and it is open right now at its current rate.

Carey Nieuwhof: So, it's around all the time, but rates are gonna go up, and I've added a whole lot of bonuses for the month of January, so if your ambition exceeds your current capacity, that is who The High Impact Leader is designed for. Listen, I did not have the system before I burned out over a decade ago, so I've distilled everything I've learned over the last 13, 14 years, into ten key principles you need to maximize your output as a healthy, sustainable leader.

Carey Nieuwhof: It's all in The High Impact Leader Course, and it's open now at the best rates with brand new bonuses, and it's your last chance to get the course in 2019 at this price. So, if you're ready to get your life and leadership back for real, head on over to [thehighimpactleader.com](http://thehighimpactleader.com). Just go right over, right now, to [thehighimpactleader.com](http://thehighimpactleader.com), we'll take care of you there.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, and, speaking of better impact and a more positive impact, let's jump into my conversation with bestselling author and consultant Jon Gordon. Jon, welcome to the podcast. I'm so glad to have you.

Jon Gordon: Carey, thanks for having me.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah. So, you work with a lot of great organizations. 16 books, and you consult with the LA Dodgers, Atlanta Falcons, Dell, like in the tech world, Southwest Airlines. A lot of banks, Behr, and even the West Point Academy. Like, you pretty much hit the whole leadership spectrum. Tell everybody what you do, and I would love for you to share how you got into doing what you're doing.

Jon Gordon: Well, it's been a journey. My wife and I were fighting a number of years ago, and I was miserable, negative, unhappy with my life, and she came up to me and she said, "You know what? I love you, but I'm not gonna spend my life with someone who makes me so miserable." I was 29 years old at the time, two small children. Fearful, and stressed, and I really didn't have any faith. So, I remember praying, really, for one of the first times, praying and saying, "God, why am I here? I know I'm here for a reason. What is my purpose?"

Jon Gordon: And writing and speaking came to me. I said, "Okay, what am I gonna write and speak about?" I didn't know, but I knew that that's what I was supposed to do. I wanted to be more positive, so I started to research ways that I could be more positive on my own journey, and it was through the emerging field of positive psychology. So, I found all these great tips on being positive. I found that you can't be stressed and thankful at the same time.

Jon Gordon: So, I started taking these walks of gratitude everyday, called a thank you walk, and everyday I would be walking and saying what I was thankful for, and then I started to pray on these walks. I wasn't a Christian, but I just started to pray. I actually grew up Jewish. My mom was Jewish, and my biological father was Jewish. My stepfather, who was my dad and raised me, he was Catholic, Italian. So, we never went to church, never went to temple. There was no religion in my life, but I just started to pray, and then my good friend Daniel Decker, we both know, gave me these sermons from Erwin McManus

Jon Gordon: And one was called Why I Follow Jesus, and I heard that sermon, it really started to speak to me. I heard a sermon from Rob Bell, called Covered In Dust, about Jesus as a Jewish Rabbi, and that really spoke to me, and about why his followers would follow him, the disciples, and that story, and that just really spoke to me, and Erwin's words just really brought Jesus to life for me, and so from there I went on this spiritual journey, and that coincided with me knowing that I was supposed to write and speak, and next thing you know, I wrote a book called The Energy Bus.

Jon Gordon: And that book came out, and it wasn't a bestseller right away. It was rejected by over 30 publishers, but that book-

Carey Nieuwhof: Really?

Jon Gordon: Yeah, but that book started to get into the hands of different leaders, different sports teams, coaches, school principals. They started to read that book, and then I started getting invited to speak to these various organizations, and then from there, that really began my leadership journey. I wasn't a consultant, I was just someone who was going out speaking, and then when I was there, I was interacting with the leaders, and the people from these companies, and I just started to learn a lot. So, it was like on the job training of leadership. Not community leadership, but practical leadership about what works, and so for the past, now 11 years, since The Energy Bus has been out, that's what I've been doing.

Jon Gordon: Speaking about leadership, working with teams, and doing this work, and I realized, that was my ultimate calling. This is why God had me here, to teach, learn, and share about leadership and building strong teams.

Carey Nieuwhof: Any idea why you were so negative in your 20s? I mean, we all have that voice in our head, right? Like, I have my days, and my bad days, my wife and I have had conversations, but, like, what lead you to the point at 29 where your wife's like, "We're not doing this ... ?"

Jon Gordon: Two small children, and I was just so fearful about my life and about my future, and I had no faith about the future. I was just so scared that my life was gonna turn out horrible, and so I think with the fear and the pressure of having to provide for two small children, as a young dad, having this wife that I needed to support, I couldn't handle it. I wasn't mature, so I believe fear and stress, and I was losing the battle of my mind. But, again, my worst moment ... that was one of my worst moments, lead to my best moment of the work I get to do now.

Carey Nieuwhof: So, you're googling, "How do I become a more positive person?" Like, that's how the journey started, Jon?

Jon Gordon: I don't think Google was around at that point.

Carey Nieuwhof: 11 years ago, I'm trying to think. It would've been a pretty basic search engine.

Jon Gordon: Yeah, it was a few years, you know, before 11 years ago. I think this conversation was around ... 'cause I'm 47 now, so, 20 years ago.

Carey Nieuwhof: 20 years ago, okay. So, you started, what, reading books? Going to seminars? What was your path?

Jon Gordon: Yeah, I started researching, again, positive psychology. There were books on positive psychology, Martin Seligman, and on the internet, the old-fashioned internet, there was different research and articles like that, and so I started to see all this cool research, for instance, focusing on what people were doing right, and they'll do more things right than ... also, the ratio of positive interactions versus negative interactions.

Jon Gordon: So, I started to find this research, and then I started to apply it. The coach in me takes this information and figures out how to apply it. That's even what I do now. I take these principles, and say, "Okay, how can we apply it so that leaders and teams could use it and work with it?" So, from there, it just began this journey of finding what works in terms of positivity. And I started a newsletter, a weekly, positive tip of the week, and every week I would send these positive tips out.

Jon Gordon: Sometimes, it was inspiration. Sometimes, it was research. I mean, now everyone has a blog. Everyone's sharing information on social media, but back

then, this was 2002, I shared a weekly positive tip, and it started with an email. I would just email the people on my email list. My mother, my brother, my best friend from college. They were getting these tips whether they liked it or not.

Carey Nieuwhof: It's like an old-fashioned all send. Remember those, from 100 years ago?

Jon Gordon: Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, yeah, yeah. You BCC everybody, or whatever.

Jon Gordon: Yeah, I did. I would BCC 'em all, and just send it out. But people started to share it, and people started-

Carey Nieuwhof: Wow.

Jon Gordon: You know, asked to be added to the list, and from there it grew and grew and grew, and that lead to the opportunity to try to publish these books.

Carey Nieuwhof: So, you talk about your spiritual quest, which is amazing, which ended up you becoming a Christian and following Jesus. You talked about your daily walks, and gratitude tips. What are some other ... ? 'Cause you live in the world of the practical. What are some ... ? 'Cause there's a lot of people who struggle with negativity listening to this podcast. What are some, like two or three, and I know, 16 books later, this is complicated, we're not gonna have time to touch it all. Two or three things, that like, "You know what? You try this, you will see a difference."

Jon Gordon: The best advice I ever heard was from Dr. James Gills, the only person on the planet to complete six double ironman triathlons.

Carey Nieuwhof: Wow.

Jon Gordon: That means you do an ironman, 24 hours later you do another one, and the last time he did it he was 59 years old. So, he was asked how he did it. He said, "I've learned to talk to myself instead of listen to myself." He said, "If I listen to myself, I hear all the negative, all the fear, and all the doubt, but if I talk to myself, I can feed myself with the words and the encouragement that I need to keep on moving forward." He would memorize and recite scripture, and that's what fueled him.

Jon Gordon: And so, for me, I do a lot of talking to myself. I realized the negative voices are lies. I don't believe the lies. Instead, I do what Jesus did in the wilderness: I speak truth to the lies. I actually teach this to professional athletes, to leaders. Everyone really gets it, which is really cool. I mean, I will share these tips in a corporate environment, in a business setting. Now, I won't go the Jesus route, but I'll talk about the lies, and fear, and negativity, and I ask them: does negativity come from you?

Jon Gordon: And they said, "Yeah, yeah." I go, "Really? Who would ever choose to have a negative thought? Would you ever choose a negative thought?" No one would ever choose one, so it's not coming from you. It's coming from the enemy, it's coming from a spiritual place. It's a spiritual battle, and once you understand that, you could armor yourself with the truth, with these positive words that help you overcome the lies that come in all the time. So, for me, that's really the biggest battle that I've won over the years. Through prayer, through trusting God, through belief, where, on a daily basis, I'm taking these walks of gratitude and prayer.

Jon Gordon: I walk, I surrender, I let go of ego and fear, I say, "God, I trust in your plan for my life." I say, "God, use me for your purpose, guide me towards my purpose, have me help who you want me to help, have me serve who you want me to serve." I also repent on these walks. It's like the number one thing that I've done in the course of my life over the past, you know, 12 years, now, on this daily walk that has really transformed my life.

Carey Nieuwhof: I'm curious. Why walking? What is it about walking?

Jon Gordon: I think that's the time that I just get most silent. It's the time that God can reach me. I'm not saying everyone should go out and go on a walk, right? For some people, it's a bike ride. For others, it's when they're in the shower. You know, for me it's during these walks that I'm able to just really connect, and then to receive, and every idea I've had, all these books that I've written, has come on these walks. So, I'll be walking, and then I'll get this idea that just comes to me on the walk.

Carey Nieuwhof: Isn't that interesting? Are they 20 minute walks, half hour walks, hour walks?

Jon Gordon: They're all depending on the time, and what's happening in the day, but sometimes there are ten minute walks, sometimes 20. Usually an hour. Love to walk for about an hour, and you come back, and you've created a fertile mind and a spirit that is ready for great things to happen. Now, I also, at night before I go to bed, my wife and I pray before bed. We were just on TV sharing these tips on TV about the fact that we pray every night before bed, and that's one of the key things that have allowed us to stay connected together. So, that's been really important, so that's another ritual we do.

Jon Gordon: Try to eat right, exercise every day. Things like that to really stay healthy on this journey.

Carey Nieuwhof: Isn't that interesting? You know, that you talk to yourself. As a preacher, I'm preaching on Psalm 42 in a couple of weeks, and that's exactly it. I've called the week talk to your soul, and it's actually a biblical concept, where, "Why are you so downcast, my soul?" Why? You know, put your hope in God. Like, you basically talk yourself out of your despondency, and that's exactly what you're talking about, isn't it?

Jon Gordon: Oh, it is, and I love when Jesus was in the wilderness, and the devil was lying to him. What did he do each time? He said, "It is written. It is written. It is written." And I learned from that, and I was like, "That's it. He spoke truth to the lie. He was giving the playbook on how to deal with the enemy." Now, when I'm speaking to younger people, I'll even talk about this in a secular setting. I'll say, "Hey, what is Star Wars about? What's it a battle between?" And they'll say, "Good and evil."

Jon Gordon: What's Harry Potter about? Good and evil.

Carey Nieuwhof: Good and evil.

Jon Gordon: What's Superman about? Good and evil. What's Wonder Woman about? Good and evil. It's the narrative in the universe. It's our narrative that we face evil with good, and so it's the battle between good and evil, and that is our journey. It's what Jesus talks about, and it's our path as human beings, and taking on the evil with good, with a trusting God, and once you understand that that's the battle, now you can win the battle.

Jon Gordon: And you can't win the battle if you're just trying to come up with mental strategies. Like, "Oh, I had this mental strategy." 'Cause it's more than a mental strategy. It's understanding the truth that allows you to win the battle.

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh man. I have so many questions. So, one of the things that I think a lot of us would assume, 'cause again, you're working with top corporations, top athletes. I mean, you're working with the cream of the crop. That's your day job. A lot of us would think, "Well, these guys don't have those struggles." Like, "They're not battling at this level." What are you finding, working with these guys?

Jon Gordon: I find that, whether it's a CEO, a head coach of an NFL team, or a super star player, we're all dealing with these battles 'cause we're all human, and so often the more success you have, the more fear you have, because the farther you have to fall. You're scared of losing what you have, and you don't wanna lose it, and so the enemy comes in even more and attacks you in the place of your identity.

Jon Gordon: And when your identity is your success, when your identity is your money, or your power, or your position, you will be attacked even more, and so I see it as my role to help these people through these challenges. But, again, I'll talk about it when I speak to them in terms of positive leadership. Right? How do we lead from a positive way? And then, as we talk about positive leadership, and building strong, positive teams, from there, on the individual level, when we have this relationship and you find out different people are struggling with different things, that's when you can talk about that on a personal level.

Carey Nieuwhof: Right, and get into what motivates your worldview and your faith and your belief system.

Jon Gordon: Exactly.

Carey Nieuwhof: What are some common characteristics of high performing individuals, or high performing teams?

Jon Gordon: Well, from a team standpoint, they all have a shared vision and a greater purpose. They know where they're going, and they know why they're going there. They stay positive through the challenges. I mean, every team will face challenges. And stay positive may sound cliché, but it's really about staying positive through all the adversity, all the obstacles. I was just with the Rams during their training camp, and I said to them, "You guys are all positive now, because you're undefeated. You haven't lost a game."

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah.

Jon Gordon: It's the teams that stay positive throughout the season that accomplish great things, 'cause right now we're positive, but once we have our first loss, how do we respond? So, as a leader, and as a team, you have to work through those struggles, stay positive through them, continue to move forward, and that's a key attribute for teams. They have this belief and optimism where they just don't let it go, and then they're really connected. You have to be a connected team if you want to be a committed team.

Jon Gordon: Everybody wants commitment on their team, but you will never have commitment without connection, and I have found that these teams get connected. They have what's called emotional safety, psychological safety, where they have trust, where they build a bond. Where they feel free to fail, and be vulnerable with each other, and from there, this bond, this trust, this relationship, is what really drives true and lasting success. Again, you see the teams that give up halfway through the season 'cause they're not connected, and not committed.

Jon Gordon: You see the teams that don't have team grit. Everyone talks about grit. You'll never have team grit without this connection and commitment. And then great teams also have the difficult conversations. They move from what I call like to love. I wrote this in *The Power of a Positive Team*. Right? From like to love. Steve Shyman taught me this principle, 'cause he realized that in his work with teams there's so much like today. Everyone wants to be liked, 'cause all the likes in social media, right? No one wants to rock the boat, but they stay surface level as a result of that.

Jon Gordon: And then they never move to greater intimacy. They never move to love, because they don't have the difficult conversations. You have to have the difficult conversations. Pete Carroll has tell-the-truth Mondays after their Sunday football games. Seattle Seahawks. Tell-the-truth Mondays, right? Okay, every Monday we get together, we're gonna tell the truth. This is what you did wrong. These are the mistakes you made. Here's what we need to do better. But

no one gets defensive, 'cause they know it's part of their culture. It's about accepting feedback. It's not demeaning. It's demanding, but not demeaning, and in that process everyone gets better.

Jon Gordon: So, great leaders and teams are demanding, just not demeaning, and they're all moving towards a standard of excellence where they really wanna improve every day. They're always striving to get better. They have what I call positive discontent, where when they win they say, "Okay, we won, but what could we do better?" Just like in your church. "Alright, we had a great service. Service was awesome, but what could we do better? We're gonna celebrate it, but how can we improve?" Or, "This was a really bad service. That was a bad service. Okay, what did we do wrong? How can we get better?"

Jon Gordon: So, regardless of whether it's bad or good, they're always striving to get better in the process.

Carey Nieuwhof: So, that's interesting. So, being positive doesn't mean you just gloss over mistakes or problems, but I love how you say you're demanding but not demeaning, because I think we've all been in that situation where it's been demeaning, not just demanding.

Jon Gordon: You know, when people see my book *The Power Of Positive Leadership, and Positive Team*, they think, "Okay, this is Pollyanna positive." And I love when I get to share, "No, this is not Pollyanna. This is about confronting negativity. It's about dealing with negativity. It's about addressing the challenges, and it's about pursuing greatness together." We're not just here to have fun together, we're here to pursue greatness together. Because we believe the best is yet to come, we give our best to each other, we give our best each day to create the best outcome.

Jon Gordon: So, this is about pursuing excellence, and it's about love and accountability. That's the key to great leadership today, it's the key to great teams. Two words: love and accountability. You have to have both. If you have a lot of love but no accountability, you're gonna be a great family. You're gonna love each other, but you're not gonna be very accountable, and you're not gonna be moving towards greatness. If you have a lot of accountability, which is the way a lot of us lead, but not enough love, well, then you're always pushing, you're grinding, you're challenging, but there's not enough love to invest in that relationship, and so what do you do?

Jon Gordon: You get what Andy Stanley said: rules without relationship lead to rebellion.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah.

Jon Gordon: Right? So, you have to have the two in combination together.

Carey Nieuwhof: Okay, so let's say an NFL team that's 0-10 calls you in. Alright? Jon, Jon, we're 0-10, we haven't won all season. Alright? Our fans, there's three people left in the stands, the owner's furious. You walk into that situation, how do you coach that organization?

Jon Gordon: Well, first and foremost, not every team I work with wins, and I share that. I spoke to the Cleveland Browns two years ago, so I know that's not me. Right?

Carey Nieuwhof: Right.

Jon Gordon: And I went to them halfway through the season, so it's a very similar situation of what you're talking about. I never like to go in at that point. I really believe the key is during training camp, 'cause you have to set the culture at that point. You set the expectations, and these are the foundational principles that'll allow you to have a great season. So, we like to do it early on, and then I found that the coaches and the leaders, they engrain these principles, and they live those principles, then you see results.

Jon Gordon: So, it's always the leader. Never the talk, never the book. It's always the leader, but if I go in, and they're 0-10, we're talking about getting better. We're talking about improvement. We're talking about staying positive for ourselves and each other. We're talking about being positively contagious right now, that every day you show up, you could be a germ or a big dose of vitamin C. What kinda energy are you bringing to each other and to your team? And it's believing the best is yet to come, and the idea is, "Hey, let's give our best everyday right now." Because what you do right now will not only determine how you finish the season, but it will also determine how you start next season.

Jon Gordon: It will determine your career and how you move forward, because you commit to that right now, everything you do from here on out will never be about the circumstance. It will always be about being the best that you can be.

Carey Nieuwhof: No, that's good counsel. So, I'm thinking about pastors who feel like they're the Cleveland Browns. It's like, "Man, you should see this team." Or, you know, business leaders who are like, "Well, I have a startup. It's almost a non-start at this point." When you're talking with the head coach, when you're talking with the quarterback, and they come to you and they're saying, "Jon, I'm just discouraged. I wanna throw in the towel." What do you say to them?

Jon Gordon: Well, it's what I wrote in *The Power of a Positive Team*, the fact that discouragement is so often why we give up. That's why staying positive is so important. We get discouraged, we give up. We stop trying, and so we don't give up because of the challenge, we give up because we get discouraged. And if you could just stay positive and move forward one step at a time, and strive to get better every day, then you move yourself, and you move forward in a positive direction, creating a greater outcome in the future.

Jon Gordon: So, that's why encouragement is so important. That's why we need more encouragement in this world. That's why I do what I do. My job's really just to encourage. I mean, I saw Dabo Swinney. I work with Clemson Football, you know, for the past seven years now, and I've seen this coach, this leader, just believe. Just stay encouraged no matter what happened. No matter what loss they had, he stayed encouraged, stayed positive, and kept on instilling that belief in others. Leadership is a transfer of belief, and so if you, the leader, are not believing what's possible, if you're not positive, your team will never be positive.

Jon Gordon: You have to realize that you're transferring your belief every day to your team. That's why you must be a positive leader today. Through all the challenges, you must lead your team in a positive direction, and I've seen the great leaders that do that. That's why I know this is not Pollyanna. Alan Mulally turned around Ford. Took over as CEO in 2006. They were losing 14 billion dollars. 14 billion.

Carey Nieuwhof: With a B.

Jon Gordon: Talk about discouraged. But he saw it as an opportunity. He was excited about it. He had them profitable in a few short years.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah. During the biggest recession since The Great Depression.

Jon Gordon: Well, imagine that. So, 2006, he takes over. They restructure the company, they start building great cars, they're reorganizing everything, doing everything right, and 2008 hits, and all of a sudden, no one's buying cars. Man, everyone got discouraged but him. He said, "We have a plan." Everyone must embrace the plan, relentlessly work towards the plan. And so, he just kept everyone focused on the plan, continued to work on it, stayed positive, defines his leadership style as positive leadership, and transformed the company.

Jon Gordon: One of the greatest leadership feats in history. So, if that pastor of a small church, and they're struggling, things not going well, if that small startup business person, it's not going well, you have to look at your vision and say, "Okay. Is this our vision? Is this really where we wanna go? Do we still believe it's viable?" 'Cause that's another question, right? "Do we have a bad model? Is the business just not right? Is it not gonna succeed no matter what we do? Like, even God can't make this work." Right?

Carey Nieuwhof: Right, right, right.

Jon Gordon: So, is it like ... Cleveland Browns. Like, I feel like no one can help the Browns. Right? And so ... and I actually root for that team, by the way. But if it just is so bad you have to evaluate that, but you truly believe, "This is what we wanna build, this is what we wanna create, and you know what? We believe it's possible." Then you continue to work for it, and stay encouraged through the process of it.

Carey Nieuwhof: You write and talk about energy vampires. Can you tell us about that? What's an energy vampire? How do we know if we see one or if we are one?

Jon Gordon: Well, every team will have energy vampires. Even Jesus had an energy vampire on his team, named Judas, right? So, everyone will have an energy vampire. That's the person who sucks the life right out of their team, they're focused on themselves, they don't care about the team. They're just really, really negative and they bring the team down, and so, as a leader, one of the biggest mistakes we make is that we do not focus on dealing with the negativity. We do not confront the negativity. We allow it to exist and persist, and then the negativity grows, and it winds up sabotaging the organization.

Jon Gordon: So, we have to address it, but we do so in a positive way. The biggest problem ... well, one of the biggest problems also is that leaders get negative about negativity, and so they go through their routines, and they're like, "Hey, you gotta be positive," and they're all negative. Where they say this, from The Energy Bus, "You're either on my bus or off my bus. You decide." And that's not the intention. You have to love tough, not tough love. Love tough is the key. Love must come first. If your team knows that you love them, then you earn the right to challenge them but love must come first, and so a lot of people unfortunately, though, have taken my book The Energy Bus, and what they're doing, now, is they're using it as a way to control people, and to say, "You're either positive or not"

Jon Gordon: Or, "You're getting off my bus," or, "you're an energy vampire, you need to change." And that was never the intention. The intention is you must address the negativity. If someone is an energy vampire, you address them in a positive way. You try to help them become a part of their culture. You try to transform them with love, with empathy, and coaching, and mentoring, and guidance. But if that person, then, at that point is really negative, if they're not willing to change, if they are sabotaging the team, and there are those people, then you may have to let that person off the bus.

Jon Gordon: And you have to do so so they don't hurt the rest of the team, but first you must lead with love.

Carey Nieuwhof: So, yeah, that's an interesting perspective, because I think, you know, you think of a board of directors, church world, corporate world. You have that one negative voice. "I'm not negative. I'm a realist." Right? What ... ? So, that has to be confronted?

Jon Gordon: Yes, and I love when people say, "I'm a realist." Right? "I'm just being a realist." Meanwhile, when Steve Jobs would say to his team, "Hey, we're gonna do this software in this amount of time." And they'd say, "There's no way. There's no way that it's gonna happen." They said how he had this amazing ability to distort their reality. He distorted their reality. His reality distortion field, they called it, from pessimism, or realism, "I'm just being a realist," to optimism.

Jon Gordon: And time and time again, they accomplished the very thing that they thought impossible. Now, you wanna have some of those people on the team that, again, try to bring some objectivity to it in a sense. They wanna bring maybe even some conflict, because those people might get you to think about things you wouldn't normally think about, but once you have those discussions, then they must join the team and get on the bus and believe about what's possible when you have those discussions.

Jon Gordon: If that person just wants to be negative for negative's sake, they're an energy vampire. If they're trying to make the team better, and that's their intention, and they do so, and they made you think about things that you normally wouldn't think about, that's actually an attribute to the team, so you need that as part of your time. Notice, we're talking about some conflict. You have to have some conflict, as our friend Patrick Lencioni talks about.

Jon Gordon: I mean, you have to have a conflict on ... I call it positive conflict. It's conflict that makes you better and stronger. So, you have to have these difficult conversations that make you better. You can't ignore it. And so, if you have it, and it makes the team better, then you can grow from it. So, the ratio you want us like five-to-one or greater positive to negative interactions. Three-to-one or greater. Seven-to-one or greater is awesome, but if you get to 13-to-one, 13 positive to one negative, the team starts to fall apart, 'cause no one's dealing with the real issues, then we are Pollyanna.

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh. Is that an aggregate? Like, you know ... so, you have an hour meeting or whatever, and you want a three-to-one, five-to-one, seven-to-one positive over negative?

Jon Gordon: Yeah, I think it's mostly in terms of over the course of a relationship, over the course of the time of being together, and so forth. Maybe not in one meeting. In one meeting, you might have more negativity that meeting, but over the course of a relationship. John Gottman's research shows, in marriage, is the ratio, it's five positive to one negative. As a ratio approaches one-to-one, one negative to one positive interaction, the marriage is more likely to head to divorce.

Carey Nieuwhof: Fascinating. So, when it comes to that board member, or that team member, staff member, key volunteer. Whatever it happens to be, is that a good indicator? Like, they are three times positive to one time negative? Because, I mean, there is ... we've all been around tables where there's that one guy, nothing positive ever comes out of his or her mouth, and is that always ... ?

Carey Nieuwhof: You know, and you try to build them up, but they're just, "This is just the way I am. I call it the way I see it." Those are the energy vampires, or how do you know that this person isn't just a correctable good person, or coachable person, or, "You gotta get off the bus ... ?"

Jon Gordon: That's through leadership. That's the ... you know, there's no scientific formula. That's the magic of great leaders that can actually embrace those people, coach those people, talk to that person one on one, and get more out of the person than others would or will, and so for someone like that, I would love to start a meeting with that person and say, "Okay, hey. What are we doing right? What's going the right way right now? Like, you have to come up with a couple of things we're doing right, because there are good things we're doing. And so, what are we doing right?"

Jon Gordon: And then, "What are you excited about in the future? What are you optimistic about?" If that person, especially, is in a church, right? They better be optimistic about the future.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, yeah. We have the gospel, you better find something positive.

Jon Gordon: And there are too many people that aren't. There are too many Christians that you would never know they're Christian because they're not very optimistic, or faithful, or hopeful, so again, "You're making the team better, getting us to think about things we normally don't think about." But get that person to start sharing some positive interactions, some positive, hopeful things about the future, and positive things they see, so we can start getting that person to think a little bit differently on the team, and then we talk to that person and say, "Look, we have to have more positive interactions. We're better when we're positive."

Jon Gordon: And when my son, for instance, says, "Dad, I'm just being me." 'Cause he's got the, "I'm just being me," thing. "You said you should be authentic." Yeah, you should be authentic, but you should be the best version of you. Right? This is not, like, "I'm just being me, but I'm a jerk. That's just who I am." No, no, no. You don't have to be that. You can be the best, most positive version of you.

Carey Nieuwhof: One of the things that I've found helpful in leadership, and you've hinted at it, is just what I call alignment. In other words, if this person actually wants the church to grow, if they want the church to thrive, and they're like, "I'm not sure this is the best strategy," that's totally different than the person who's like, "Yeah, I'm just thinking about me and all the negative thoughts in my head." That's good, to develop a filter.

Jon Gordon: Yeah, the energy vampire is often bringing their own personal wounds, and their own struggles, and their own issues, and they're bringing it to everyone else. Again, as Christians, we have that empathy for those people. We have to wanna help those people, and guide those people, but it doesn't mean that that person necessarily should be part of your team. Andy Stanley also said, you know, "You want to have a ministry, not hire a ministry." And so, again, you wanna make sure that people on your team are contributing to the team in a positive way, 'cause one person can't make a team, but one person can break a team.

Jon Gordon: And so, when I have a coach, for instance, that has someone who's really struggling as a young player, and they got issues that they grew up with, pain that they've endured, you know, issues that they have, well, I totally tell the coach if that person's doing anything to sabotage the team, and really hurt the team, maybe you have to let that person off. After you do everything you can, but then, don't let that person out of your life. Continue to mentor that person. Keep that person close. Call 'em up. Encourage them. They may not be on your court, or your field, but they could still be on your team where you love them and you care about them.

Jon Gordon: And again, that's a different approach than just saying, "You know what? You're an energy vampire, that's it." We don't wanna exclude people, we don't wanna get rid of people, but, again, when you're here to do something, when you have a mission, when you have a purpose, when you're moving towards that and someone really is sabotaging it ... again, not one time, okay? A lack of belief one time, or a negative thought one time, or a fight. Teams are gonna fight, but if that person, over and over again, is really sucking the energy out of the team, and hurting the culture ... I work with a lot of school districts, and you get a couple of those teachers, and they're sabotaging the culture, and they're now affecting the entire culture, to make a difference in these kids' lives?

Jon Gordon: Well, then, that person needs to either get on the bus or get off the bus, because you know what? We're here to make a difference in kids' lives, and if you're gonna sabotage that, and you're focused on you instead of them, 'cause it's all about you and not the kids? Okay, this person may need to get off the bus if they're not willing to change. My whole litmus test, if you're willing to change and be coached, and we can work together and get better? Alright, let's do it. But if you're not willing to change, if you just continue to wanna be negative, and you think it's everyone else but you, and that's your issue? Well, then, you might be an energy vampire.

Jon Gordon: But, again, it's not perfect science. There's no perfect formula. The leader's job is to figure out who needs to stay, and who may need to go.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, last question for you. You have, or encourage, what I understand to be a no complaining rule. Can you talk about that, dealing with ... ? We've talked a lot about negativity, but where does that go, and what does that look like? The no complaining rule.

Jon Gordon: Why have we talked so much about negativity?

Carey Nieuwhof: I don't know. Probably because we're talking to church leaders. It's funny, because I didn't ... I mean, the questions didn't go there, but this interview went there. It's fascinating.

Jon Gordon: No, I love it. Yeah, I love it, I love it. Rich Wilkerson's a good friend, and Rich Wilkerson, years ago, before the book really even took off, he read The Energy

Bus and The No Complaining Rule with his church, down at Trinity, in Miami, and they implemented the no complaining rule, and it transformed their culture. And as a new Christian, I had no idea that churches were negative. Like, I was blown away, 'cause I really made up this idea, like, "Oh, they gotta be like amazing, positive places, and everyone's optimistic and gets along, and hopeful, and sings songs, and that's the way it is behind the scenes."

Jon Gordon: I really had that childlike belief that that's the way it was, and so I'll never forget talking to him and going, "Oh, wow. I had no idea it was like that." And so, it's been a-

Carey Nieuwhof: You're making me laugh. You know, I ask these questions with the leader in mind, and I talk to so many discouraged church leaders, so many discouraged business leaders, and it's just hard, day in and day out. That's why I'm grateful for you, Jon, and grateful for what you do, because I think you're changing the conversation, you're changing the culture. But thank you. Thanks for that audible you just called in.

Jon Gordon: I appreciate that, and since that time, though, a lot have implemented the no complaining rule, and it's really simple. It's a great, positive way to deal with negativity. You implement a no complaining rule that says, "You're not allowed to complain unless you come with a solution." So, we wanna hear your complaints. Bring your complaints, but also bring your solutions. And if you do that, what happens, now, is the complaints are a catalyst for new ideas, for improvement, for a better process of how we can do things.

Jon Gordon: If you just allow people to complain, and that's venting, that only leads to toxic energy, toxic attitude, toxic behaviors, and then you sabotage your church, your team, your organization, your sports team. So, I have had teams do no complaining training camp. The Atlanta Falcons did that for years. No complaining training camp. We're not allowed to complain if we're in training camp. See, 'cause energy vampires are overt. You can see who they are, you know who they are, and you can deal with them. It's that subtle negativity of complaining that slowly will sabotage a team and an organization if you allow it to exist.

Jon Gordon: So, you implement this rule, and it was really invented by PPR, which is a nurse staffing company. The CEO's a friend of mine, and he told me how he implemented this rule. One of the best places to work, every year, in a commoditized market, staffing, they're outperforming their competition. Ten times the growth. And they have such a great culture, 'cause they tell people when they come on board, "Hey, we have a no complaining rule. If you're a complainer, this is not the right place for you. Hey, we want your solutions. We empower everybody." And that's the key. If you're gonna implement this rule, you have to be a group of leaders, and you have to have leadership that is willing to listen to the complaints.

Jon Gordon: You can't say and have this rule if you don't allow people to share, because then you're just stifling people, and they complain, why? People complain because they feel powerless, or because it's a habit, and when you have both of those issues, you feel powerless, and a habit, now you get a chronic group of complainers in your company or your team that will sabotage it.

Carey Nieuwhof: Jon, you helped a lot of leaders today. Thank you so much. You're speaking something like, what? 13 days in a row, for the next two weeks, or something? Crazy.

Jon Gordon: Yeah, I'm doing a big real estate conference, then going to State Farm in Nevada, then Arkansas football, Clemson football, then I go to school districts in the following week. Like, five school districts in a row throughout Texas, Nebraska, Pennsylvania. Come back, and a few other events, and it's gonna be a crazy couple of weeks.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, and you were really generous with your time with us. You've encouraged a lot of people. There's gonna be people who wanna get your books, jump on your website. Where can they find you online?

Jon Gordon: They can just go to [jongordon.com](http://jongordon.com). That's [jongordon.com](http://jongordon.com). Twitter, @jongordon11, same name with Instagram and the others.

Carey Nieuwhof: Thank you. Thanks for a breath of fresh air, Jon. We really appreciate you.

Jon Gordon: Thanks, Carey. I appreciate it.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, I bet you feel better than when you started this episode. Do you? I hope so. I did. Jon, I love that, and you know what? That is something I fight for every day, positivity. If you wanna dig a little bit deeper, just head on over to the show notes. You'll find it all at [careynieuwhof.com/episode239](http://careynieuwhof.com/episode239). If you have trouble remembering how to spell that, just go to [leadlikeneverbefore.com](http://leadlikeneverbefore.com) and search Jon Gordon. It's Jon Gordon. You'll find the show notes there.

Carey Nieuwhof: We also have transcripts, and of course you can get this podcast for free anywhere you get your podcasts. Apple Podcasts, Spotify, TuneIn, Stitcher. Wherever it's convenient for you, we are there, and we love doing this with you. Now, just a reminder, because time is limited on a couple of offers. The High Impact Leader is open right now, and if you haven't yet checked out The High Impact Leader, thousands of leaders have, and I could go on all day about the difference it's made, but it's all about getting your life in leadership back.

Carey Nieuwhof: And it's not just like little hacks. This is about a system that actually works, so it's the one that lead me to, like, write four books, and you know, they've become bestsellers, to do a leadership podcast, to teach full-time at my church, to lead, travel, speak, have a better marriage. All those things, I teach you not how to do that, but how to have a system that allows you to do that without burning out.

That's what The High Impact Leader's all about. So, go to [thehighimpactleader.com](http://thehighimpactleader.com) and remember, very limited time specials for Pro Media Fire.

Carey Nieuwhof: You've got to check this out, because, you know, even if you're like, "Well, we don't really have any staff in media, or we have one guy, or one woman, or whatever." You can do more at a fraction of the price you would pay a staff member. Cloud based media support, so unlimited graphics, unlimited church videos, for a monthly, flat fee. Head on over to [promediafire.com/carey](http://promediafire.com/carey), you will save between ten and 40% if you act now.

Carey Nieuwhof: And we're back Thursday, you don't have to wait a whole week. That's right, we're doing six episodes a month most months, and we are back Thursday with a fresh episode. This one is gonna be fire! It is with Annie F. Downs, and if you don't know Annie Downs, you gotta get to know her. She has a massive audience. She is just an expert at connecting with her tribe, and we talk about that. We talk about how women leaders connect differently with their audiences than men, and guys, we better have our notebooks open, because, honestly, so many women ... like we say with Lysa TerKeurst a couple weeks ago, have far bigger audiences than most men, and like, we're oblivious.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, you won't be after this episode. Listen in.

Annie F Downs: What is honest is we are saying to these women, "Hey, we're literally just like you. We are just like you. I'm living a life. I gotta do my laundry too, I gotta get my oil changed too, and, man, I didn't plan to be single in my 30s, either. And I'm busy, too, just like you guys who are moms, and I'm, you know, I'm just like you. Here's something that I've learned, and here's a book." And then they go like, "Man, this person is just like me." And it seems to me ... correct me if I'm wrong, Carey, it seems to me that men want to listen to men they wanna be like, and women want to listen to women they think they are already like.

Carey Nieuwhof: So, that is Thursday, and again, if you subscribe, you will get it automatically, for free. And you don't have to listen live, but then, you know, you've just got it. I only ever listen to the podcasts I subscribe to, so if you're not a subscriber, please do so, and we are anticipating much fun. I was also on Annie's podcast earlier this year, as well, so we will link to that when it comes out.

Carey Nieuwhof: In the meantime, thank you so much for listening. You guys are the best. Thanks for all the encouragement. Thanks for letting me know that this is making a difference, and I really do 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.

