

- 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. Now, your host, Carey Nieuwhof.
- Carey Nieuwhof: Hey, everybody. Welcome to Episode 273 of the podcast. My name is Carey Nieuwhof. I hope our time together today helps you lead like never before.
- Carey Nieuwhof: One of the things I love about being able to do what I do is I get to meet some fascinating people with incredible stories. I know we have a ton of young leaders listening whether that's in the church world, the marketplace. A lot of the times, it's very easy early on to have no idea where your life is going and no idea what's possible.
- Carey Nieuwhof: That's why I think you're going to love today's interview. I'm sitting down with Ron Kitchens. He has a fascinating story. He grew up, as he'll share, with next to nothing. He has gone on to found one of the greatest employers in the entire Midwest, Southwest Michigan First, an economic consulting firm which just creates literally tens of thousands of jobs.
- Carey Nieuwhof: He's the founder of the Leadership Conference Catalyst University, co-founder of Next. Ron and his team have been extensively featured in places like the Wall Street Journal, Fast Company, CBS, NBC, FOX, USA Today, Forbes, Fortune, The Economist and National Public Radio.
- Carey Nieuwhof: He's an author. His company has been recognized as one of the top five best places to work in America as well as a national brightest and best company back in 2016. Ron is a fascinating guy and is a bit of a leadership guru himself. He would have never known that when he was growing up. I just love stories where your past doesn't define your future, let alone your present. To see the things that God has done through him is just incredible.
- Carey Nieuwhof: I think you're going to love this interview today. If you haven't subscribed yet, man, we have some great shows coming up. We've got Sam Collier back on the podcast, Drew Dyck, the former editor of Christianity Today. Ian Morgan Cron is back which I'm super excited about. Ron Edmondson catches us up on leadership now that he's the CEO of Leadership Network. Talking about succession with Lee Kricher and Jason Howard. Also, David Kinnaman back on the podcast, Max Lucado and who else is coming up this fall? We've waited a long time for this one, Gordon MacDonald, yeah. Scheduled to do that interview in Boston this summer. I'm so excited for that.
- Carey Nieuwhof: If you haven't subscribed, do it for free. Speaking of free, have you tried Trained Up for free for 14 days at their website yet, [servehq.church](#). I'd love for you to try online training for your church. We've gone to it at Connexus Church, so have many others. It may not be the perfect fit for every ministry but you know what, 95% of leaders who try online training with Trained Up see success and stick with it for the long term.

Carey Nieuwhof: Why is everybody moving to online training? A few reasons. First of all, everybody in your church is familiar with learning online, especially people under 40, for example. YouTube, 95% of Gen Z is on YouTube every day. Online learning is an incredible opportunity many leaders are missing. By making some training available online, you give more people the chance to be fully equipped as in 100% completion on your training courses.

Carey Nieuwhof: Rather than getting 40% to 60% of your volunteers or teams trained, you can get 100% trained. Getting new volunteers ready to serve is tough because on boarding happens over time, right? You pick up two new volunteers this week, 10 the next when you do training?

Carey Nieuwhof: If it's online, you can do it any time. Like I said, you can try it for free for 14 days with ServeHQ. When you sign up, you'll be walked through a simple process to help you test out the platform. See how it will work in your ministry plus their team is incredibly responsive. A live chat customer support for every customer seven days a week and they're happy to help you at no extra cost.

Carey Nieuwhof: Try and Trained Up for free for 14 days at their website, servehq.church. You can try it for free for 14 days. If you listened last time, you heard me talk about the Orange Tour. We are so excited for that. I'm going to be in some cities this fall so are Reggie Joiner, Kara Powell, Jon Acuff and so many more. It's a one day event with some super inspiring sessions designed for your entire team. It's built around the theme of it's personal.

Carey Nieuwhof: I'm pretty excited about this one because Reggie Joiner is probably the most relational guy I know. We live in a highly digital age but when you get into Orange Tour, you're going to see how important it is for people to rally together in person around the next generation.

Carey Nieuwhof: At OT 2019, you're going to learn how to synchronize small group leaders, design events that work together to complement your strategy, develop a team that's aligned, rally volunteers, partner with other churches. You'll meet tons of leaders from your city and region. You can also learn how to queue every parent and even grandparents to live a lasting legacy of faith and character in their own kids.

Carey Nieuwhof: It's an incredible price. Because you listen to this podcast, you can hit any one of the 15 cities by going to orangetour.org, use the code Carey, C-A-R-E-Y on checkout. You get \$10 off the regular price. That's like the super early bird prize.

Carey Nieuwhof: You're going to be doing great. If you head on over today to orangetour.org and use the coupon code Carey and you'll get \$10 off. That's \$10 for every person who registers. I would highly encourage you to bring your team. I'm going to be, if you're wondering in LA, like Irvine and also in Phoenix in Austin. I'm looking forward to that this fall.

Carey Nieuwhof: Hey, without further ado, let's jump into my conversation with CEO of Southwest Michigan First, Ron Kitchens. Ron, welcome to the podcast. It's so good to have you.

Ron Kitchens: Great to be here with you. As you know, I'm both a big fan of the podcast and I think I've heard it every episode, we have some mutual friends who talk so strongly about your leadership and how much you enrich them. I'm so glad to be here.

Carey Nieuwhof: It's just great to meet you and an honor to meet you. I want to start at the beginning. You're very successful, we're going to talk about all that, all the stuff the God's done in your life as an entrepreneur, as a CEO and community person, philanthropist, et cetera, et cetera. You didn't grow up in an affluent, wealthy or high influence home. You keep a can of Mandarin oranges on your desk, really?

Ron Kitchens: I do.

Carey Nieuwhof: What is that? What is that?

Ron Kitchens: Neither of my parents finished the eighth grade. They both dropped out of school. My father, because his father had died and he had to take his role in the family to support his mother and sister. My mother was kind of a precocious child. They got married when my mom was 14 and my dad was 15. My dad ...

Carey Nieuwhof: Are you kidding me?

Ron Kitchens: No.

Carey Nieuwhof: Wow.

Ron Kitchens: They ran off to Mexico to get married because they couldn't get married in the ...

Carey Nieuwhof: I don't even think that's legal.

Ron Kitchens: Yeah. I'm not sure it was legal in Mexico either but they did it. I was born a year later. My mom was 15 years older than I am. My father and I share the same trait that we're both dyslexic. Mine, I'm be able to overcome. He never did.

Ron Kitchens: He had to get his driver's license out to write his name down. He had to take a dangerous job and when I was four he was killed in an industrial accident because the sign said, "Don't do this" and if you can't read the sign, it really doesn't matter that it's there.

- Ron Kitchens: A few years after he died, a group of men from a church we didn't attend, showed up at the holiday season with a Chiquita banana box. If you've seen a big thick cardboard waxy box ...
- Carey Nieuwhof: Wow.
- Ron Kitchens: ... and knocked on the door. At that point in my life, you never answer the door because it was either a bill collector or something bad was going to happen. My brother and I hid and watched them leave this box there. We go to get the box and it's a Christmas box.
- Ron Kitchens: It's got a turkey in it. It's got stuffing and mashed potatoes, powder mashed potatoes and other things in there. It's got a can of Mandarin oranges. When the Ozark mountains in the 1970s tropical fruit whether it was fresh or canned was something really special and you saved it for special occasions.
- Ron Kitchens: This Christmas, the house smelled like pinto beans because my mom had been cooking beans every day. She had a little money to buy us Christmas presents. It was a Christmas miracle for us. That can of Mandarin oranges went on a shelf to be saved for special.
- Ron Kitchens: If you're poor, there's a hierarchy. When the bills come due and you've got to move because you can't pay the rent, you always take the food. The clothes might get left, the books might get left, your shoes might get left but you always take the food.
- Ron Kitchens: This can of Mandarin orange went from every house that we moved into. It became the symbol for this little boy that somebody loved me. Somebody out there cared. These men from this church that I didn't know loved us and cared about us. It really became, when I was scared, it was my safety blanket. It would sit on that shelf and I would go look at it and know there was something better.
- Ron Kitchens: Like all canned food will do, it began to swell and my mother threw it away. I guess I had lamented long enough that she went and bought another can. I went to put it on the shelf and she said, "No, no. I want you to put that on your desk." I was the dorky little kid who knew that other kids had desks so I had to have one. Mine was an old metal TV tray and ...
- Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, I remember those, yeah. My grandmother used to have one. Yeah, TV dinner trays, yeah.
- Ron Kitchens: I put my can. She said, "You go put that on your desk as a reminder of the price of lack of education." There was a can on my desk. There has been a can on o in my desk for every desk I've head in college, in graduate school, every business desks I've ever had.

Ron Kitchens: I have three desks today. There's a can of oranges there that now go beyond education and they're really to remind me of my responsibility to lead and take care of others. My wife and I have donated close to 100,000 cans of Mandarin oranges to homeless banks, to church food pantries over the years as our reminder that there are little boys and girls out there every day that need to know that somebody cares about them.

Ron Kitchens: I've adopted the color orange, a specific color orange, for all of our leadership programming. Everything you see is orange because it reminds my whole team that we are here to serve. They all know that story. When you come to work for us, your first week or so, you're going to find a can on your desk. Somebody is going to tell you, "Go ask Ron about the can," because we want people to know we have an obligation to serve and that to be a tangible reminder every day of the blessings those three men gave me and my responsibility to give it back.

Carey Nieuwhof: You orient every new employee in your company around that can of oranges?

Ron Kitchens: Every employee is oriented around it. Everybody wears orange clothing for events or orange bracelets or orange lanyards and they know why it's orange because it's ... our corporate color is red but for everything about leadership and serving people, we use the color orange.

Carey Nieuwhof: I've read a lot of biographies in my life and when I was preparing for this interview and I read your biography, it's a little hard to get out in a sentence. Can you just give us let alone a paragraph or a book? I think your bio is basically a book. Can you just give us a summary of what you have built? What you've started? What you've done? Because the path from where you started to where you are now is not a typically traveled path.

Ron Kitchens: No. Yeah. It's functionally dysfunctional I guess maybe. Yeah. I grew up poor, as not a tremendous student like a lot of kids, a lot of young men. I thought sports was my key to college. I go to play. I'm lucky enough I was invited to play college football.

Ron Kitchens: The very first week of training, my knee gets blown out and it's all over. There's no scholarship. There's no anything. I had a great mentor who came to me and said, "Let me tell you what your future is. Your future is, you're going to go to college and you're going to drop out because you're going to have financial problems. You're going to have a flat tire or something's going to happen. You're going to go to fewer and fewer hours."

Ron Kitchens: "Along the way, you're going to get a job. You're going to borrow money so you can get your car fixed so you can go to college. A couple years from now, you will quit college. You've gotten some girl pregnant and you'll eventually be the most popular guy in the assembly line at the fan company on the outskirts of town."

Carey Nieuwhof: Wow.

Ron Kitchens: We can change that. He came along side of me, brought other business people alongside who agreed to mentor me. The agreement was I bought a convenience store and they said, "You'll run this business. You have to attend college every semester that we support you and mentor you. Eventually, you'll graduate and you're going to do great things."

Ron Kitchens: Long story short is it took me eight years to get through college doing that but I got through college. I built a very successful business. One day, my banker said to me, "I just paid off our fourteenth deal." The banker, I was bragging to the banker, I'm not bragging, just talking about how many people I could hire and how excited I was because I grew up knowing the most important thing was a job.

Ron Kitchens: Everybody who had what I want had one thing in common, everyone had a job and that's all I really cared about. He said, "All you care about is jobs" and I said, "Yeah" and he said, "No, I didn't mean that as a compliment." He said, "One of these days things are going to go bad and you're going to lose your whole business and everybody works for you will lose their jobs. We have to find a different path for you."

Ron Kitchens: Along the way, I have been frustrated in my hometown that nobody could come back after college. At age 20, I ran ...

Carey Nieuwhof: Your hometown was where?

Ron Kitchens: In Ozark, Missouri, in the Ozark Mountains and nobody could come back after college. I ran for city council at age 20. I won three times by landslides because technically nobody ran against me but it was a landslide either way.

Ron Kitchens: I discovered that what business can do and what government can do to help create jobs. It started me down this path of then figuring out if we brought philanthropy and we can both build businesses, serve my personal mission of growing organizations that build jobs using dollars of philanthropy. We've been able to do incredible things over the last 30 years around this idea that the greatest force for change that I can have is on helping people get and keep jobs, grow businesses and build leaders can go do amazing things.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, that's interesting because the friends who introduced us when they were saying, "Oh, you get to get to know Ron," it was like yeah, he's the biggest job creator in Western Michigan, the State of Michigan, his region, his area. That's what your bio says, it's all about jobs.

Carey Nieuwhof: Explain the philosophy behind that. I mean, obviously, there's a certain logic to it. Of course, you need a job. You have a job. You get some income. You can pay your bills, you eat and live indoors but like why are jobs so important to you?

Ron Kitchens: Because when you grow up poor, when you grow up in influx, what you're craving for is knowing where your place in the world. The fear is everything can be taken away from you. Somebody decides, you didn't pay your rent, you have to move, you have to move. You end up living in your car. Families get separated because they don't have the resources to take care of each other. Communities fail, entire towns disappear because of the lack of jobs.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah.

Ron Kitchens: Clearly, my faith drives it and my belief that God planted in me this seed to work with communities, organizations to create jobs, to change people's lives. That if people have good jobs that pay reasonable salaries within the US healthcare benefits and retirement programs, that they'll take care of themselves.

Ron Kitchens: They'll have money to contribute on Sunday to the church. They will volunteer for their children's soccer team. They will serve on boards. We know the places that affluent have less crime, have less domestic violence, have less of all the negativity and influence is created in only one way and that's jobs.

Ron Kitchens: I not only serve the community we're in but we created an association that now has 300 communities from around the country, who are actively participating in this journey. We can share our knowledge. We treat ourselves as a teaching hospital version of an economic development corporation.

Ron Kitchens: Everything we know except somebody else's finances, we will share with anyone whether they perceive they're a competitor of ours or not, we are going to share with them. Because in the end, all we care about is there's one less family that needs that box of food on Christmas.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's a powerful philosophy. Can you tell us a little bit about what you're currently involved in? Your job as CEO and I mean, again, there are so many associations and initiatives and conferences and events that you're part of. Just give us the quick current bio run down.

Ron Kitchens: Yeah. I lead a group called Southwest Michigan First. We're a Regional Economic Development Corporation based in Kalamazoo, Michigan. We also lead a conference called Catalyst University that takes place in June 20th this year. It's about three, not about three dozen. It is 3,000 people and that's because that's all we can get in the hockey facility and still be able to feed everybody.

Ron Kitchens: You got to feed them. You can't get them to show up and it really started out of this idea that my friends who were CEO's of big companies, they all have plenty of resources to take themselves for training. The people, the next row down and the next level down we're getting the development they needed.

Ron Kitchens: I've been speaking all over the country in events and I got to meet people like our mutual friend, Brad Lomenick, and said, "You know what? I can do a

conference. I've seen how they do this. There's other than little financial risk, it's not brain surgery." I went to my board and they ... I can remember it as like yesterday they said, "We're with you."

Carey Nieuwhof: This is the board of Southwest Michigan First?

Ron Kitchens: Yeah. The board of Southwest Michigan First and they said, "We're with you. Win or tie." Okay. All right, I know what that means. We had 180 people first year. The next year, we are at 500 and then 600. Then we changed facilities and we're now in year nine and we're at 3,000. We're so committed to it that one of the things we're working on is I'm cheering the effort to build a new arena so we can put 7,000 people in.

Ron Kitchens: Not just for our event but for all the other events too. The only way I can grow ours is until Zig Ziglar's saying, you have anything you want in this world if you just help other people get what they want.

Ron Kitchens: I want to be able to serve 7,000 people in our community and leaders from all over the country. The way to do that is to build a new arena and make sure everybody else gets to use it too.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's incredible. I mean, you shared that with me ahead of time before we start the recording and I'm like, "What? You're at capacity and now you're like, well, I just build something twice the size for the community." Where does this drive come from?

Ron Kitchens: I think it really comes from, I spent the first 40 years of my life terrified that the people who knew me would find out that how poor I'd grown up and find out that we would move and I'd have to ... I'd scout out the grocery store because at that time grocery stores all had Goodwill charitable boxes in the parking lots.

Ron Kitchens: I knew I could always get clothes there. I would scout out where those were and then my brother and I would go down and we'd climb inside of the boxes and find clothes so we would have clothes to go to school in. I was terrified that people would find this out. I had two incidents back to back over a two-week period.

Ron Kitchens: One which is on a three-day retreat called The Walk to a Mass. It's a men's or women's retreat. Part of it, I had to breakdown and realized that what was keeping me from being closer to God and being authentic was this fear that my highlight reel that if anybody found that who I was, I'd lose my job, I'd lose my friends, I'd lose my house, I'd lose everything, which is a silly fear in retrospect but it was very real.

Ron Kitchens: Once that happened, it was as if ... and I began to tell people about how I grew up and the things about me and the things that I fear the most. What I found is my leadership begin to accelerate and more opportunities came my way. We

went from having, I don't know, four or five team members to we're over 35 now. It just is built upon that and this authenticity.

Ron Kitchens: It's just the drive. One of my oldest memories is my mom sitting in an orange from like a table crying because she's going to write a check. She's either going to pay for her car to be fixed or pay the rent and she can't pay for both. If she doesn't pay the rent, we get evicted. If she doesn't pay for the car, then we can't get groceries, she can't get to her job and crying about having to make that decision.

Ron Kitchens: I go to bed at night worried about those little boys and girls watching their moms cry. We just got to do more to change the world to make life better by giving people more opportunities.

Carey Nieuwhof: How did you come to peace with your story having lived in fear of it for four decades? What were some of the factors? Because obviously, now, you leverage that as a key strength. I mean, you opened with it in this conversation.

Ron Kitchens: Yup, it is. The weird thing, I mentioned there were two incidents, The Walk to a Mass which was all about my faith. From that day, 15 years now, 14 years now, I've been wearing the same bracelet that I put on that day at the Walk to a Mass.

Ron Kitchens: A little fishing swiveled bracelet that I wear to remind me that this is my anti-fear amulet. This reminds me that I'm enough. The other one was I sat in ... I've never been to a Broadway play before and I was in New York on business. A friend had told me that the show Wicked was really good and it was just out.

Ron Kitchens: I went and sat in it and I got a ticket on the second row. Because last minute seat. I go to sit there and the song Defying Gravity gets played. Then, they go to intermission. I am ugly crying. Not, oh, we just had a baby and weeping. Somebody got married. No, no, I'm ugly crying because I realized I've spent my whole life believing I was inferior.

Ron Kitchens: Believing that there were some things wrong with me because of where I had come from. Not realizing that that was the gift I had been given to make me strong to fulfill my mission. Then, the next week, I'm on this Walk to a Mass. I realized that God put me there. I was willing to lose it all if that's what it meant to be unique and authentic. What I found was people, every time I speak to a group about my dyslexia, and I nearly didn't graduate from college because of my dyslexia, because it didn't get diagnosed until I was a senior in college.

Ron Kitchens: I just always struggled. Every time I speak to it, two or three people in the group will come up afterwards in tears because they are terrified to tell somebody. I speak to a lot of college groups. These young men and women will come up just in tears because they've never told anyone that they have the exact same thing I do. They don't know where to turn for help. I'm telling you, when you know that

because you have pastored people who can finally find somebody they can be safe and honest with. It's life giving me to know that my story changes other people's lives.

Carey Nieuwhof: How do you or how did you lead before that epiphany, that coming to terms that wrestling at around age 40? How did that transformation impact your style of leadership, your approach to leadership? How are you different today as a leader than you were 20 years ago?

Ron Kitchens: My 20-year ago person it would ... I would quote Gordon Gekko, "Greed for a lack of a better word is good." I wear suits with suspenders and I would model the worst behaviors that I would see because they look like the people who are most successful.

Ron Kitchens: When you grow up as I am, I'm blessed because my form of dyslexia is that I see all words as pictures.

Carey Nieuwhof: Wow.

Ron Kitchens: I don't see, I can't sound out a word. I can't read music, it's impossible because everything's a picture. It means I see everything as patterns. If you would, everything I know is like on a giant Rolodex. If you'd ask me something, it's how fast can I spin the Rolodex to break the answer.

Ron Kitchens: I would see these patterns and go, okay, if I want that then I have to behave in this way. I am a terrible copier. I'm name dropping here but I just had Jon Acuff on my own podcast and Jon was ... one thing Jon was saying ... I said, "Jon, how come you're so authentic?" He goes, "Because I'm a terrible John Maxwell," because when I try to fake somebody ... and you just wrote a great blog about people who copy other people's sermons.

Ron Kitchens: They don't mean malice by it, it's fear that drives that in a lot of people or ignorance or there's lots of reasons. For me, I would copy people because I didn't know any other thing to do. Once I realized I'm not going to be ashamed of who I am, my own self came out and my own leadership.

Ron Kitchens: I began to say, "How do I wish I was treated if people knew who I really was?" When that's your perspective, then all of a sudden, you treat people differently. Our organizations on this journey, we were just named last year by Outside Magazine as the best place to work in America. Wall Street Journal named us their top 30 places to work in America.

Ron Kitchens: Lots of those, but it's because everyone is authentic and vulnerable. We all know, the bad things about me everybody knew already, I was the only one who wasn't acknowledging them. Once you get past that, the level of freedom to operate is just ... it's amazing.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's incredible. Yet, you had met with some measure of success prior to that epiphany. It was a big growing company but even more so, in the last ... in the year since then.

Ron Kitchens: Yeah. I was negotiating billion dollar deals. I negotiated a multi-billion dollar deal with the government of Venezuela. Hugo Chavez was leading it, where on a big refinery expansion by them. I am in great success but I would go home completely defeated. Just exhausted. I couldn't find joy anymore. Because I knew I wasn't the original. Nobody ever pays full face value for a fake.

Ron Kitchens: You can go on the streets of New York and you can buy a Fendi purse for \$8 or whatever, but the original is going to cost you thousands. Nobody pays full price for a fake. What we do is we devalue our self when we start because we know we're fakes. We know that it's not authentic. The success you have feels like it's somebody else's success. It feels like you didn't earn it.

Carey Nieuwhof: Was that a tough transition? I mean, I've been in very different way had one of those catalytic moments when I was around 40, where I just broke down, burned out and was a slow multi-year reinvention but as authentic as I could be and that's it. I didn't want to go back to normal. I wanted to find a new normal. I have the privilege of waking up and being who I am every day, which is incredible and very liberating. It took a while. How was that reconstruction process for you? Was it frightening?

Ron Kitchens: It was frightening in that the people who knew and loved you as you were go, "Hey, what's the matter? You were this person. We want you to do this." As I begin to be honest about who I was, my weight had ballooned up, I was 440 pounds. I'm now down, let's see how much of that, 165 of that. 170 of that I've lost over this.

Carey Nieuwhof: It's incredible.

Ron Kitchens: Because it was that big miserable. It was that burnout, not feeling valued. Once I began this journey, it's an ongoing journey for all of us because no matter how successful you are, you go, "Oh, if I could just do a standup comedy routine, I could go be Jon Acuff."

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah.

Ron Kitchens: If I could just get a baritone voice, I could be this incredible speaker. If I could just bounce on a trampoline for 12 hours, I could be Tony Robbins. No, no, no. I got to be the best me. When I do that, people flood into my life who ... any of my latest book, Uniquely You, came out of this idea that every time I would talk about something that I thought was this dysfunctional thing about me, we would get 50 or 60 emails or text or people calling from the podcast and from blogs saying, "Hey, I have the same problem," or "what would you do in this

environment?" I realized that maybe my job isn't to be the Tony Robbins or Steve Jobs.

Ron Kitchens: Maybe my job is to be the coach to the coaches. Maybe my job is just to lift up people who are going to do amazing things with their lives and to pour into them. It certainly serves my heart and soul. If it lifts them up, wow, I can't think of anything better that I want to do with my time in my life.

Carey Nieuwhof: There's a lot of places we could go in this conversation, Ron, we'll probably circle back to this a little bit later on. I want to talk a little bit about your companies and some of the things that you do. I think it's Southwest Michigan First that had compounded growth at 20% annually for about 14 years is that right?

Ron Kitchens: Yeah. It is.

Carey Nieuwhof: You want to talk us through that? That's pretty exceptional. How did that happen? Describe exactly what you do as an economic engine for the region, for the state?

Ron Kitchens: We were founded under the belief that the greatest force of change is a job and to go make that happen. We began as this traditional not for profit 501C3 charitable corporation that you could only do so much under those parameters. We began to look and see how do we multiply our success? How do we bring in the model that we created we call community capitalism. How do we bring in the business community with government and then with charity and church, with the philanthropy side?

Ron Kitchens: How do we bring all of them together to say, "We all win if we create a better ecosystem." We've been able to have tremendous success on the job creation side. What we found is we simply couldn't do it with a tin cup as a charity. We've built businesses that then can support our charitable mission. We have for profit investments. We have a cool investment called Impact Athletic.

Ron Kitchens: On the sidelines of college football games and every national hockey league locker room, the tables that the players are taped on and stretched on are ours.

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh, wow.

Ron Kitchens: We own 40% of that company. Because the local entrepreneur brought the idea to us, we put together the investment group around it. Now, those tables are manufactured in Michigan and sent all over the world. We've invested in about 100 companies. Some of those, we run ourselves. Consult and Connect is one where we have 300 economic development organizations in both Canada, Mexico and the United States who we work with to help them grow their communities.

Ron Kitchens: Because we had all these knowledge and frankly, I'll be really honest, it came out of the Willow Creek Model, where I would see them with the Willow Creek Association pouring in to other churches and pouring into them much the way NB Stanley has done with you.

Ron Kitchens: We decided that's what ... We couldn't find good business models that serve to grow communities, so we went and studied high growth churches all over America ...

Carey Nieuwhof: Fascinating.

Ron Kitchens: ... and said, "How are you changing community? However you define community. What does that look like? How do you convince your local folks it's okay to share the knowledge you had?" Because even if it's God's work and God's money people get parochial.

Ron Kitchens: We were able to build a model out of that where we can just go serve and love communities. We amalgamate some fees around that. We bring those dollars home to grow around organization.

Carey Nieuwhof: I just want to make sure I have this right. Are you a little bit like a company that really exist to grow other companies like in the same way that the WCA has supported churches or North Point network or different churches. Which is really innovative because you're right, companies tend to be very territorial. Is it a little bit like a corporate venture capital fund? It's like you're starting all these things left, right and center. How many jobs would you be responsible for creating today, do you know offhand?

Ron Kitchens: Over the course of my career it's North of 50,000. In the last 10 years we're at about 36,000.

Carey Nieuwhof: 36,000 jobs, that's a lot of jobs.

Ron Kitchens: Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof: Wow.

Ron Kitchens: Plus then all those created by the people that were serving. We should keep better track of their success too because we own just a lot bit of that. We just want to pour in to people and know that they're one last mom crying at that orange table tonight.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah. Again, those jobs spun other jobs would spun other jobs, right, and so on and so forth.

Ron Kitchens: Yup.

Carey Nieuwhof: Wow. How do you get 20% annual growth for 14 years then?

Ron Kitchens: This is one of those things that people ask regularly. The only thing I can say is we have a belief that every member of our team is the CEO of their own responsibility. As the point leader the organization, I set my own schedule. I have a board of directors but they're pretty hands off. I decide how resource is going to spent. I decided how I'm going to take care of the clients I'm responsible for.

Ron Kitchens: I decide when I'm going to go on vacation. I decide when I'm coming to work or when I'm leaving work. I want that for everyone. I'm a terrible boss in that I don't ever want to fire anybody. We hire amazing people and the process is very long. It takes three or months for us to select somebody and get them on to our team. Because of that, we almost never lose somebody.

Ron Kitchens: If we lost somebody, it's to go lead another organization. As I tell people, I want to be quoted in the press release for your new job about how lucky they are to get you. When you built an environment like that then people you say you're responsible for you. You know what your outcomes are. We've committed to that. You lead in that level. There's no bureaucracy. Everyone has and knows that they have the exact same maximum on their credit card that I have on my credit card.

Ron Kitchens: They know that they have the keys to everything in the office. The only think under lock and key they don't have access to is our CFO and financial records there. Your first two weeks with us, you spend the first two weeks learning everything about the organization and you're handed a binder and a digital copy of everything that you need to know to run the organization by yourself.

Ron Kitchens: As we say, if we all go out to lunch except you and get food poisoning, we want to make sure you can run the entire business till we're back.

Carey Nieuwhof: Really?

Ron Kitchens: When you do that, when you train for that and you invest to people at that level, our cap on growth, we haven't found it yet. People are designing. They're treating it like their own business and they're designing greatness around it.

Carey Nieuwhof: Play that out. I mean obviously, there are tears in any organization. Are you saying this a little bit like Horst Schulze, I guess in the Ritz-Carlton, where its ladies and gentlemen and everyone has this fear of authority. How does that play out in your company then to the point where somebody who would have an entry level position, let's say a clerical position, you all get food poisoning. They can run the company like how does that work?

Ron Kitchens: They can run the entire company.

- Carey Nieuwhof: My goodness.
- Ron Kitchens: Other than writing checks but they could put everything on a credit card, if they had to. They could run a whole company. It came from my time of living on the Texas Gulf Coast where you have to worry about hurricanes. My thought was what if a hurricane came and we all were spread out, we still have things we have to be responsible for, how do we do that?
- Ron Kitchens: It developed from there. What I found was if you hire amazing people who want to run, they won't stay around if you have a lot of bureaucracy.
- Carey Nieuwhof: I'll be back with more of my interview with Ron Kitchens in just a moment. Hey, I want you, if you live in the cities of Seattle, Phoenix, Kansas City, or Austin, to know that Andy Stanley is coming to your town this fall for the Irresistible Tour. He is going to pick up where the book left off. He's excited about being in those cities.
- Carey Nieuwhof: My friend Reggie Joiner hosts the Irresistible Tour. Andy delivers the content, Reggie host it. I sat down with Reggie and I said, "Hey, Regg, you and Andy have worked together for 25 years starting North Point Church together. North Point is all about reaching on church people but clearly so much has changed. How have things changed over the last 25 years?"
- Reggie Joiner: The six of us who started North Point started because we really cared about people who didn't go to church. We didn't start North Point to reach people who are already attending. We started it to reach people who weren't. Somewhere in those early days, Andy introduced this idea. This church will never be about who we can keep. It will be about who we can reach.
- Reggie Joiner: We don't want to keep people for the sake of keeping people, that means we're not going to reach people we need to reach. We've discovered through the years, and this is what Andy is just genius about. We discovered through the years as culture shifts as it changes, we have to shift our approach and change how we do what we do. What we're 25 years ago or 20 years ago or 15 years ago doesn't work today.
- Reggie Joiner: One of the things that Andy brings out in the year Irresistible Day is how social media has profoundly affected how kids and teenagers and this generation processes truth and information. If we can't get louder and stronger and smarter in what we say and how we say it, we're going to lose a generation to ideology and things that aren't complete. They're thinking because we're not in the middle of that conversation having a better conversation help them understand who God is.
- Reggie Joiner: This one day really challenges all of us to rethink how we do church, how we do our programming. How we do our communication and our language so that we can honestly make sure the main thing is the main thing. Somewhere through

the years, it's easy to shift away from what it really means to be a follower of Jesus and what the primary thing is that distinctively makes us Christian.

Reggie Joiner: He brings that back to the forefront in a way that I think is very, very powerful and very effective if churches would apply it.

Carey Nieuwhof: If you, like me, are interested in reaching on church people and you're wondering why so many of the current approaches don't work anymore, you don't want to miss the Orange Tour. It's coming to Seattle, Phoenix, Kansas City and Austin. If you register right now at irresistibletour.com, use the coupon code `carey19`, it sounds like a sitcom, doesn't it? Anyway no that's Brooklyn 99. Anyway `cary19`, `carey19`. You'll get \$20 off the regular price and that's for everybody who attends.

Carey Nieuwhof: Go to irresistibletour.com, use the coupon code `carey19` and you'll get \$20 off the regular price. It's going to be a really exciting time in Phoenix, Seattle, Kansas City and Austin this fall. Without further ado, back to my conversation with Ron Kitchens.

Ron Kitchens: We're very clear. We sit down every team member begins the year with a plan of work for the year. They then sit with, and then the commitment is we'll give you the resources to do this and be successful. This is your piece of the business, your service to do. We'll give you those resources. You then meet with your mentor partner. We don't have supervisors, we don't have bosses, we have mentors.

Ron Kitchens: You meet with that person every 40 days, 40 days for us is very important. You can go through the Bible. You can through history. There's something really special about 40 days.

Ron Kitchens: For a business standpoint, meeting every month is too soon and you have these weird holiday cycles, 40 days works brilliantly. You sit down and you talk about where you are or what are the resources you need? What support do you need? Then, you give them freedom to go succeed. We just don't have people who fail because we hire the right people. They understand what their responsibilities are and then they run like champions.

Carey Nieuwhof: This is probably a separate podcast in and of itself but what are some of the characteristics you look for? It's a three or four month hiring process. We can't go into all of it. Maybe even by negative, what are some deal killers? It's like yeah, this person it's not on the team. Or, what are some must have qualities and characteristics of somebody you would hire?

Ron Kitchens: Deal killers are almost always behavioral. A resume is a resume. We're going to check and make sure you'll like you're okay. It really is the behavior. In the process, you're going to interview eventually with every member of the team. Some of them are just going to be, we're going to get coffee together.

Ron Kitchens: You're going to go have a meal and we're going to make sure your meal get screwed up. It's going to be a mistake on it. It's going to be a big mistake. You're going to order chicken and they're going to give you steak. You're going to order milk and they're going to bring you a glass of wine. Because we want to see how do you deal with that. Do you belittle the person? Do you roll with the punches? Is it completely throw you off?

Ron Kitchens: We want to see those behaviors. We're going to ask you a questions like what's your favorite sushi? We don't really care what your favorite sushi is but if your answer is, "I've never eat raw fish," then you're somebody who won't try new things and you're not willing to explore. You're not going to be very comfortable with us. Other than me, our management team is all women. They range from, let's see, 28 to 60.

Ron Kitchens: They're very diverse. If you're a man joining an organization, a lot of men particularly career men have never worked for a woman or been in a tier relationship in a professional level with a woman. We're going to put you doing an interview with two really young women who you're not going to know what their role is.

Ron Kitchens: We want to see how that interview goes. Do you treat them with respect? Do you ask interesting questions? Are you patronizing? Do you have behaviors that are less than respectful of them? If you can't do that then you don't fit with us. Then, it's also we're using a group called Talent Plus, they're out of Nebraska that measures intensity. Everybody, we use a horse metaphor. There are four kinds of horses show horses and race horses and quarter horses and plow horses.

Ron Kitchens: They all have important roles. If you put a race horse in a field to plow, it will never be successful. It can't do it. If you put that plow horse in Kentucky derby, it's not even going to live the gate. You got to make sure all the horses are the same kind of horses for the jobs that need to get done. By going through that and making sure that people are highly engaged, then we also are going to challenge people to be entrepreneurial.

Ron Kitchens: We're going to say, "If you could create a new," it doesn't have to be a for profit business. If you could solve a problem, how would you build around solving that problem? Then, you don't have to understand, we had a young woman in who we hired this week, brilliant, great grades, all of that. Came to us and said, "I hear that if I come to work here, I can be the CEO of my own responsibilities?" I said, "Yes, yeah you can." We talked about that was.

Ron Kitchens: I said, "What's your passion?" She said, "I want to change the lives of the homeless by creating dignity in how we do charity with them." I said, "That's not something we do." She said, "I know, but I'll learn the other things from you that takes to do that to change the world. Then, I can I build either my personal charitable giving, or building an organization around that." Why wouldn't we

take that person who wants to change the world and wants to do the work to do it.

Ron Kitchens: Which I don't know if that's why we went from we're an industry dominated by men, average organization looks like me, it's a bunch of 50 year old white guys. That's not who we are. We're dominated, two-thirds of our team are women. Women manage every area of the organization. The folks that we're getting to us are people that I never thought we would stand a chance of recruiting but they want to be part of something that's bigger than just profit or bigger than just another charity.

Carey Nieuwhof: Even the senior management team being all female, was that intentional or those just happen to be the people who have the qualities and characteristics you most rewarded?

Ron Kitchens: Those are the people who were the most amazing. I looked back 10 years ago, my top two people were both men, who one of them I had grown up with known from junior high school. The other one had been with me 15 years. Both got to a point that they could not deal in a world with strong amazing women who are their peers.

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh, wow.

Ron Kitchens: They were fine as long as the women were in roles beneath them. When they became their equals still talked to them as if they were girls. Still didn't value them. I had asked both of them to leave the organization. Which made it really clear to the women who were there that I got you. All we care about is talented amazing people and gender doesn't matter, ethnicity doesn't matter. It is about being amazing. When you do that and you become blind to the other stuff, you're going to thrive.

Carey Nieuwhof: Isn't that fascinating? A couple of other questions on the hiring process, you said that every candidate interviews with everyone, does that mean everyone in the organization?

Ron Kitchens: Everyone.

Carey Nieuwhof: How many people do you have on staff that would be 35?

Ron Kitchens: That's like 35 interviews now.

Carey Nieuwhof: Got you.

Ron Kitchens: You're going to do part of those at group meals. You're going to do part of them around the coffee. You're going to do a lot of, some one on ones, particularly where we want you to ask questions. If you're not coming in with lots of

questions, then we're just another job and we don't want to be that. We're changing the world.

Carey Nieuwhof: Just because I'm curious, you're not the first person to tell me that as a hiring practice, they'll take someone out to dinner and intentionally throw the meal off. I'm thinking about how I would respond so you have the person who's surly to the server. Then, you have the person who eats it and doesn't say a word. Maybe you've got somebody who like politely says, "Actually, I ordered the chicken." Or, maybe there are other scenarios.

Carey Nieuwhof: Can you walk us through what you're looking for in those scenarios to the different responses and what that tells you? I'm just curious.

Ron Kitchens: Yeah. If you're somebody who throws a fit you're done.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah. You're done, that's clear.

Ron Kitchens: We'll finish the meal but clearly you're done. If you're someone who just eats it, then we're going to talk about that as a follow-up later and say, "Hey, I noticed that they served you steak instead of chicken, how come you didn't say something?" Most of the successful candidates will say, "It just didn't really matter, I wasn't there for the meal. I was there to talk with you all and with the group. To tell you the truth, I didn't even really remember what I'd ordered. It just didn't matter. I've been there for the purpose." Which is a great answer because that's what you want. Somebody who goes no this is a business deal.

Ron Kitchens: The person who says, "Hey actually, we just want to see how assertive will you be and how gracious you will be," because the waitress is going to apologize profusely for that. If you're gracious to them and if you make them feel comfortable in that that's the home run. Because as you know, when you're a point leader or any kind of leader, mistakes are going to happen. It's what grace can you give in that. It's not enough to just say, "Oh, don't worry about it."

Ron Kitchens: The person goes home and worries about it. They fret and your relationship is damaged. If you can say, "You know what? I did the exact same thing one time," or "you're working so hard today," just give some kindness and grace so you can hire people who will extend to that. They go from being the center of the meal to making someone else the center of the meal. That's the kind of level five leader that we're looking for.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's really cool. What would you do? Would you just eat it or would you graciously point out that you ordered the chicken?

Ron Kitchens: I would probably just eat it.

Carey Nieuwhof: Would you, really. Okay.

Ron Kitchens: Because the truth of the matter is, in those things, I don't really pay much attention to what I order. I would be scared, unless it was something that I really knew that that's what I wanted, I won't worry a bit. Because I do that with my wife regularly, the meal would show up and go, "I thought I ordered so and so." She'd go, "No, no, this is exactly what you ordered."

Carey Nieuwhof: I know exactly what I ordered, I would you send it back and hopefully on a good day I do it graciously. It's funny. That's so curious to see different people. I know people will take people out golfing. They watch how they respond to bad shots or are they keeping score, all those things. I think those real life situations tell your far more than any interview ever would.

Ron Kitchens: Absolutely.

Carey Nieuwhof: Any other keys to becoming what the Wall Street Journal and various organizations have recognized as one of the best workplaces in America? I think you've given us a lot. I want to go deeper in that mind if we can.

Ron Kitchens: I think this communications and we use an analogy a lot that I got from Bill Hybels and that was, communication is a big rubber bucket that is always expanding as you pour water in, more communications in but it's also leaking all the time.

Ron Kitchens: You have to pour more and more in. When we get busy as leaders, we forget that. I can get into that mode pretty easily of, well, I'm working 60 hours a week on this. How do you all not know that this is what I'm doing and how do you not know this is what's important to me? Well, because I didn't tell anybody.

Ron Kitchens: For us, we meet every morning at 8:05 as everybody in the organization who's in town is standing in the circle at 8:05 of which we got from Horst Schulze. Fifteen years ago, I had an opportunity to have lunch with Horst Schulze and he was telling me about ...

Carey Nieuwhof: Founder of the Ritz-Carlton, if you're wondering.

Ron Kitchens: Yeah, founder of the Ritz-Carlton. He was telling me about that. It was one of those that I said, "Well, that's what I want." If that's what the best does, how do we emulate that in our own lives?

Ron Kitchens: Every morning we meet at 8:05. We have a rhythm. Everyone on the team shares their calendars for the week of the things that are important that somebody else might be able to help them with or that somebody may need to know about.

Ron Kitchens: You may say, Jill may say, "Hey, I'm going to meet with this company on Tuesday," and somebody else says, "Hey, if while you're out there, could you ask this question for me? I've been trying to get it. I can't get the answer," or,

"Hey, heads up, they were upset about this. You need to know what you're walking into."

Ron Kitchens: We're sharing that on Mondays. On Tuesdays is a vision test. Different leader from management, if I'm in town, it's me. We talk about where we are as an organization. What's going on? What are the scary things? What are the things that people are wondering about? Let's talk about things that are real, not some sales, rah-rah job, sometimes it's motivational, but this is real. Here's what's going on.

Ron Kitchens: Then, throughout the rest of the week, there's another rhythm to it, but 8:05, don't call our office. It takes between 10 or 15 minutes, but everybody shares that and communicates.

Ron Kitchens: Thursdays is always about something about you personally. Today, this Thursday, is what's your favorite cartoon character growing up and why.

Carey Nieuwhof: Hah!

Ron Kitchens: Mine was Foghorn Leghorn, but it was just-

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh yeah, yeah, me too.

Ron Kitchens: Everybody shares that and why, because it's hard to be mad at somebody when, you know you share the same cartoon character, when it's hard to not work together. It's the same reason that we, there seems these days there's a baby in our office, every other day and I have a new puppy that's coming to the office on Friday that everybody's very excited about.

Ron Kitchens: We do life together and that becomes communications. That's critical. If you want to be great, you got to be willing to be vulnerable and pull back the ignorance. Ignorance is our enemy.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, you know I find that to be very true that you almost cannot over communicate. I think you think about scale, so you have 30-ish team members, 35 team members.

Ron Kitchens: Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof: You can imagine everybody in a circle, but I think it is, and I could be wrong, General Stanley McChrystal did that when he was in command of the US Forces and involved hundreds of people on a virtual huddle. It does scale.

Carey Nieuwhof: Now, obviously, you can't have 500 people or 5000 people talking, but you can have key players bringing in sort of daily command or daily issues and then that

kind of thing. That's great. Anything else on workplace culture that everyone should think about?

Ron Kitchens: Yeah, I think one of my favorite things is about leaving loudly. Again, it goes back to this CEO thing. Everybody's the CEO of their own responsibilities, which means I can go to the gym anytime I want, but yeah I can grab my bag, go out the door and people roll their eyes, but well, he's the boss.

Ron Kitchens: Well, I have to say, I'm going to the gym. Everybody has to know that and know I expect them to do the same thing, but if they see me never do it, then they'll quit doing it themselves.

Carey Nieuwhof: Right.

Ron Kitchens: We have a model that actually came from Andy Stanley about family first. Andy called it Choosing to Cheat when he first came in. We have a rule ... One of our rules is we don't cheat at anything. I can't use that.

Carey Nieuwhof: I think he retitled the book too.

Ron Kitchens: He did. He did, but ours is family first and so there's only two real ways you're going to get me so angry, I can't speak to you. One is if find out you victimize somebody else. I have no tolerance for that. I don't care if they're theoretically an enemy, we don't have enemies, but if it's somebody we're competing against, we're just competing against them. They're not our enemies. We don't run up the score. We don't victimize people. We don't do that.

Ron Kitchens: The other one is if you don't take care of your family. If I find that your kid has got a spelling bee at school, you need to be there. We have enough people on our team, everybody's cross trained. We got your back.

Ron Kitchens: The only reason you wouldn't go is because you don't trust us. You need to trust us as a team to make sure your family is taken care of. That means, going to those spelling bees, going to your kid's track meet.

Ron Kitchens: If you have a sick child at home, stay at home. You don't have to come to work. You have a laptop. You have an iPad. You have a smartphone. All of our communications is online available to you. Stay at home and take care of your family. You're the only one who can do that role. We have other people that can take care of this stuff in the office.

Ron Kitchens: When people ... When we recruit new team members, it's funny, we tell them all about that. After about three months, that's the thing when people come back and say, "You know, I didn't really think that was real. I didn't really think I could leave and go with my mom to her doctor's appointment," and that people would celebrate that, but we ask people to celebrate.

Ron Kitchens: If you're going to be out of the office taking care of your family and doing something cool with them, whatever it is, tell us on Monday, so we can all celebrate it. Do it loudly. As a point leader, you have to do it loudly or no one else will believe that they have permission to do it.

Carey Nieuwhof: Isn't that fascinating as a cultural architect and I think that's what you are as a senior leader. I mean, I've always defaulted more toward what you're describing and probably not nearly as well, but I've always craved that kind of freedom as a leader.

Carey Nieuwhof: I've tried to create that kind of freedom for the team, but I know that most culture is not there, which is probably why 70% of Americans hate their jobs.

Ron Kitchens: Exactly.

Carey Nieuwhof: What would you say, because you get this question all the time, I'm sure Ron, but you get from people like, "Oh, that's great, Ron. That's a nice theory but what about the person who always has a sick child? What about the person who is always at the gym or decides like Netflix has that take as many holidays as you want policy? What about the person who's on vacation every month?" What do you say to somebody who raises those objections?

Ron Kitchens: When we ... Part of our hiring process is we explain this and that people know that we have it and this is what we live by, but they also know that we have very high expectations.

Ron Kitchens: You've made a commitment. Here's what you're going to get done in the next, in this year, in the next 40 days and everyone's commitment is also up on the scoreboard.

Ron Kitchens: It would say, Carey is going to make this many visits. He's going to teach this many leadership classes. He's going to do these things this year. Here's the running score of where Carey is. Everybody knows how everybody else is doing against their goals and expectations.

Ron Kitchens: In all the years of doing this and all the team members, ranging from team members in their 70s, to team members right out of college, we've only had one case where somebody took advantage of it.

Ron Kitchens: As I'm reminded regularly, it was the one case that I didn't go by the hiring system. It was somebody that I thought, "Oh, they're great. I hired all you people. I know what I'm doing. I'm just going to hire that person."

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh.

Ron Kitchens: He reminded me that's the only problem we ever had. I go last. I don't meet any candidate until everybody is vetted on and until I have ... Part of our vetting is and it came out of my church experience that our church, the tradition is on a child's baptize.

Ron Kitchens: Everyone in the church stands and makes a commitment to support the family and the child on their journey in Christianity. We asked that when people interview that you send me a note that says yes or no. If it's no, then we need to talk about that one on one, but if it's yes, you add, yes, I believe this person will be successful and I know that their success or failure is a direct reflection on me.

Ron Kitchens: I'm on you as the person that you're empowered to make them successful. When you live in that environment of mutual accountability and mutual commitment, you just don't have this abusive behavior that you worry about.

Carey Nieuwhof: High expectations, high freedom and high accountability.

Carey Nieuwhof: There you go.

Ron Kitchens: They all go together. There you go.

Ron Kitchens: They do. Yup.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yup and you probably already vetted for the toxic personalities and the non-self-starters and the lack of initiative, all those things.

Ron Kitchens: Yup.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's really good. Now, you've just hinted at this multiple times, you've referenced, "Hey, I learned this from Andy Stanley. Hey, I learned this from my church." What do you think business leaders, because you go to church but you're not in the church world?

Ron Kitchens: Right.

Carey Nieuwhof: What do you think business leaders can learn from church leaders?

Ron Kitchens: From me, I think it's a change in model. I was just ... While I was on a plane today and I was reading Harvard Business Review, a story in there. The story was about this idea that no longer are people ... People aren't willing ... Next generation leaders aren't willing to go to work for a company that isn't values and mission driven. But now as consumers, we're not willing to do business with groups that aren't mission and values driven.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's true.

Ron Kitchens: You begin to say, "Okay, if I'm a traditional business Gordon Gekko, "Greed, for lack of a better word, is good business." Who do I model the new world around? As I mentioned, we looked and looked to say, "Okay, what groups are out there?" This was pre kind of TOMS shoes or Warby Parker.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, Warby Parker. Yeah.

Ron Kitchens: It was pre then and we began to look and see, who can we emulate who is service-oriented, who wants to change people's lives, who is using the best technologies and doing it smart and they're smart with money, how they're doing it, they understand cultural change and cultural relevancy. They're serving wide range of people and it was the business that was doing that. It wasn't government doing that. It was high growth churches that were doing that.

Carey Nieuwhof: Fascinating.

Ron Kitchens: We went around the country over about a three-year period. I don't know, we got up to 28 or 29 churches and went and saw them in there. We went to see Craig Groeschel's group and talk about how it was great that you did a Digital Bible, but you did a Digital Bible that's an app and you changed the way a lot of people across the world have access to the Word of God and study groups and all.

Ron Kitchens: Well, this is the most business structure way you do that, because they were using this business platform that was created but modeling it in a way that it had never been done before. When you look at what Willow Creek Association was able to do in leadership conferences, we look at the best leadership training in the world. It's being done in church world.

Ron Kitchens: Then, it's being transitioned in the business world, but my business friends are attending church conferences and in some cases they may not know a single one of the speakers who are there because they're coming out of church world, but they're looking for values-based leaders. They're looking to transition how they serve people and meet them.

Ron Kitchens: Frankly, churches are changing faster than the marketplace, businesses will change because churches are looking at trends constantly and going, "Hey, people aren't really the great light show and the loud music. They're only really wanting that once a month. They're wanting an acoustic set."

Ron Kitchens: I grew up with where you wear a suit and tie to church and it still drives me crazy to wear jeans to church. I just feel underdressed, but business is just catching up. Business was 10 years behind church world and letting people dress comfortable and even their customers to be comfortable so that you can have a meaningful interaction. I'm a huge fan. If I could only study and learn from one type of leader, it would be church leaders.

Carey Nieuwhof: I don't think I've ever heard a business leader say that but it's fascinating. I got a bunch of leaders. I got another phone call tomorrow. Business leaders who are like, "Hey, can we get into this church leader thing that you're doing in Atlanta?" I'm like, "Sure." "All right. We'll let you and we'll set a table for you," but I wonder if there's a lot of cross-pollination.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's interesting for me to think about my biases that the church is a decade behind the marketplace, but maybe 20 years but I think you're right. The innovative churches may actually be on the cusp of something. Whereas the church as a whole, maybe lags a little behind, but I think there are great seeds of innovation.

Carey Nieuwhof: The other thing that's really interesting about leading a church is culture is your currency because you're dealing mostly with the volunteer workforce. I mean, you're not winning them with a paycheck and donuts eventually wear off and they're not good for you anyway.

Carey Nieuwhof: I mean, you really, you're trying to convince people who are already busy, who are working a full time day job, that we want you to come here, sometimes twice a week, we want you to give sacrificially of the money that God has given you and we want you to serve and invite your friends, that done well is a high demand on leadership. Any thoughts on that?

Ron Kitchens: But think about it this way, the time where in, in the United States we're at full employment.

Carey Nieuwhof: Right.

Ron Kitchens: Every year ... We're in the 3% unemployment rate. That's the same as recruiting volunteers. People go ...

Carey Nieuwhof: That's right.

Ron Kitchens: ... I can go anywhere tomorrow and get a job essentially the exact same pay or better. Why am I going to stay here? It's the culture piece and it's the values.

Ron Kitchens: When an organization, whether it be in the church, the not-for-profit world or for profit world, when you lose your moral high ground, there isn't any culture that will save you but if you have a strong great culture, then there isn't any marketplace forces that can stop you.

Ron Kitchens: We've seen it in church world. You see the church on the edge of town begins to grow and do great things. People will go, "Well, it's because they got a new building and they got a new this and they got a new that." No, they drove by, the people drove by 20 churches to get there. People are coming because of the values and the connectivity in the community that's created.

Ron Kitchens: I will tell you, if we take online communities out of that, I know no other institutions in our country that are creating mission-based communities at scale, other than churches. It's a brand-new way of doing it, because I would say I grew up in church traditional Southern Baptist, everybody wore a tie and you went to church on Sunday night and Wednesdays, but the sense of community didn't particularly carry the way it does today.

Ron Kitchens: If you go to the parking lot at my office where we share a building with several other companies, I can tell you what church most people go to because there's a sticker in the window. In a lot of cases, it's small. It's just a symbol that says I'm part of this tribe. I'm part of this community. That just didn't happen a generation ago.

Ron Kitchens: The church is doing amazing things around that. I think if we're in Charity World, Charity: Water is doing ... Scott is doing incredible things around this community, but scaling, they can only do so much.

Ron Kitchens: It's the local church that continues to scale great leaders. I think the local church is the only real hope I have right now of turning America around. I think this civility issue we have and this distrust of each other. I don't want to, I guess this podcast is safe to say.

Carey Nieuwhof: It sure is.

Ron Kitchens: If people don't get closer to God and come around those teachings, of saying, you may be different, but we can sit at the well together and share our story and drink out of the same pitcher. If we can't do that, I don't know how we do the hard things. Other than the church, I don't know who's going to do that for us.

Carey Nieuwhof: Now, I just want to echo what you say. That's the little space I'm trying to create on the internet and with this podcast and Scott Sauls has been a repeated guest and I've had others who just talk about, how do we disagree without being disagreeable? How can we regain civility in our discourse?

Carey Nieuwhof: I think the gospel is the thing that would cause us to behave in a better way. Unfortunately, sometimes it's Christians who can be pretty harsh with each other too. You've got a brand new book.

Ron Kitchens: I do.

Carey Nieuwhof: Uniquely You. I want you to tell us what made you want to write the book? Does it flow out of your story? It's not released as we're talking about it. Yeah.

Ron Kitchens: It comes out ...

- Carey Nieuwhof: This is like that big epiphany that we talked about?
- Ron Kitchens: It is. It's this idea that I get all ... We get between 50 and 60 emails, texts, calls a week from our podcasts and the blogs, all asking the same question of, it's the young woman who just graduated college, she's two years into her career and she's being treated terrible and she doesn't know what to do and doesn't know how to lead and what do I do?
- Ron Kitchens: It's the 30-year-old guy who just had a second kid who says, "You know, I don't want my dad's life. I don't want to work 80 hours a week and miss everything. How do I leave there?"
- Ron Kitchens: It's a 50-year-old guy who says, "I am leaving these two kids. I don't know what to do."
- Ron Kitchens: It comes out of the story of just be you. You are uniquely created by God to have your own stories and deliver on them. Quit trying to be the best John Maxwell. He's awesome. You can't be better than him at being him but you can be the best Carey Nieuwhof. You can be the best Jon Acuff.
- Ron Kitchens: You can be the best who you are. That's what people buy. You go to Spotify, you can download all these great artists' music, but there's no section for knockoff artists, people who kind of sounds like Garth Brooks singing his songs, but not really him. Nobody's listening to that guy.
- Ron Kitchens: If you want to have impact and influence, just be you. We tell stories, give examples about how being amazing you can change your organization, whether that's your family, your church, or you're not-for-profit, or your business. Hopefully, in the end, people find grace for themselves.
- Carey Nieuwhof: You talk about the deal you were doing, multibillion-dollar deal and being exhausted at the end of the day. You look at yourself today, where you've really come to terms with your story, your background, gotten over imposter syndrome or whatever else you were struggling with, what is your energy like today compared to how it was before?
- Ron Kitchens: Yeah, it's so I love sunrises and I get to see them a lot. I hate sunsets because I have so much more I want to get done in the day.
- Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, I know.
- Ron Kitchens: I go to bed tired but I go to bed saying, "Bring tomorrow on. Let's go." I almost never have a bad day.
- Carey Nieuwhof: Wow.

Ron Kitchens: It's because when I do something, I know ... I don't have to do things that I don't like. Everybody has to take the trash out, but I'm not pretending that I'm not taking the trash out. I'm not pretending that I'm something I'm not. You're going to know me warts and all and I'm going to be very open.

Ron Kitchens: One of the things we do every year is we throw, I live on a ... Yeah, I have a great house, not a good house, I have a great house on an inland lake and it is a wonderful place to throw parties.

Ron Kitchens: I used to worry that people would find out I had this great house and that they would [inaudible 01:23:38] and how could ... It's like the minister who drives his car that's too nice or those things. I worry about it.

Ron Kitchens: I'd say, "You know what? I'm just going to invite everybody to my house." We invite all our contributors. We invite all our clients and I throw parties all summer long at my house and I want you to know where my house is and I want you to hang out with us because I don't ever want you to judge me by something that's not true.

Ron Kitchens: It's okay if you don't like what color I painted my office at home, but I want you to go look and people regularly will throw a party and I'll find them in my home office looking for that can of oranges. They're always surprised there's a can in the drawer. Give yourself grace to be amazing and not try to feel bad because you're not the best somebody else. That's not who God made you to be.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's really good. Ron, man, time flew. Anything else you want to share before we wrap up today?

Ron Kitchens: Yeah, I think the one thing is that I share with groups when I speak and talk about a lot is what we call the Olivia Pope rule. Olivia Pope was the lead character on the TV show Scandal.

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh, yeah.

Ron Kitchens: In the early seasons of that show, it always began with her and the client and she would say, "What do you want? What do you want?" No one could ever answer the question.

Ron Kitchens: I thought I'm going to start asking that question. We had the same exact response. People who are unhappy or feeling unvalued, who are feeling inadequate, they're feeling like fakes are people who can't define what they want.

Ron Kitchens: What success look like for you? What are those things that are important that you want out of your life, because if you don't know that, then every day feels inadequate, but if you know what you want and you're working towards that, every day feels like an acceleration towards your goals and your best life.

Ron Kitchens: I challenge people to spend really quiet time, find wherever that space is for you, for me, it's sitting on the floor in front of our fireplace with my puppy and spend some time thinking about what I want and then writing it down. I have it on my dresser mirror and I have it on my mirror in the bathroom that say, "Here's what I want."

Ron Kitchens: One of the things is on Tuesdays, I want to be grateful and I want to pray for everybody on my team. It's up there to remind me that I want that grace for myself and the best way I can get it is to be really structured about my prayer on Tuesdays and because then I go into the office and I lead them in a much different way than I would if I didn't do that.

Carey Nieuwhof: Do you have a different thing you want for every day of the week?

Ron Kitchens: I have a different area that I focus on ...

Carey Nieuwhof: Got you.

Ron Kitchens: ... For day of the week. It isn't about just I wanted this car and I wanted that thing and I wanted this...some of that. I mean, early in my life and I share it in the book, lately one of our goals was we wanted to be able to by more than one week's toilet paper at a time. We were so broke we couldn't buy more than one week's toilet paper. If we had people over at our house, we would have to slow down our own use.

Carey Nieuwhof: Don't use too much. Don't use too much. Maybe you should go before you need to use the restroom.

Ron Kitchens: Yeah, great.

Carey Nieuwhof: Okay.

Ron Kitchens: It changes in your life but simply by knowing what you want is how you can give yourself grace and permission to be authentic and to be unique.

Carey Nieuwhof: Ron, this is so rich. The book is called Uniquely You and if people want to connect with you, where can they do so online?

Ron Kitchens: Oh, the easy places just ronkitchens.com or @ronkitchens. I guess that Instagram I was slow. It's ron.kitchens. Somebody beat me to it.

Carey Nieuwhof: Darn it. Yeah.

Ron Kitchens: Yeah. Everything else is just ronkitchens.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's the best.

Ron Kitchens: Thank you.

Carey Nieuwhof: Ron, congratulations on the book. I'm just so excited to see the difference you're making in the world too. It's a thrill to have you on the podcast. Thank you.

Ron Kitchens: Oh, thank you and I really appreciate you.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, that's a powerful, powerful interview. If you want some more, you can go to careynieuwhof.com/episode273 where we have show notes, transcripts and so much more. I'll tell you, that was really challenging for me as well.

Carey Nieuwhof: Hey, next week we're back with a fresh episode. I talked to Ideation founder, Charles Lee from Silicon Valley and well, here's an excerpt from that interview.

Charles Lee: What I had realized kind of a big takeaway through that time was I had confused competency with calling. I think I was good at a lot of different things, but what my therapist, when she walked me through was like, "What are you kind of best in your world at?" I realized it was like really executing and scaling ideas. Even while juggling 10 different things, I realized that's one thing I did really well. I took that for granted.

Charles Lee: As you know, Carey, sometimes our greatest strengths are kind of in our blind spots because we assume everybody else knows how to do it.

Charles Lee: Then I realized, man, oh, that's the unique, I think gifting that God has given me. That's where the idea of Ideation came from was. How do I help others really not take their ideas to their grave, but help them really scale those concepts, because I had a knack for how to do that and that's where Ideation came from.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's next episode, which is in July. Can you believe it's almost July already? It's insane. If you subscribe, you get it for free. If you're on your summer holidays and you're like, "Oh man, I missed that one". No, you won't not if you subscribe, wherever you get your podcasts, Apple podcast, Spotify, Stitcher, wherever. We're there.

Carey Nieuwhof: If this episode has meant something to you, please share, please leave a rating and review. We are closing in on 9 million downloads and the reason is because you are so generous in sharing and I want to thank you so much. We really do hope this helps you.

Carey Nieuwhof: Remember, if you haven't yet tried out Trained Up for free, you can do that at servehq.church and we got two really exciting events coming to a city near you this fall.

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Carey Nieuwhof: Orange tour is in 15 cities this fall. You can go to orangetour.org. Use the code Carey and you'll get some money off the regular price. Then the irresistible tour with Andy Stanley is coming to Phoenix, Seattle, Kansas City and Austin. If you go to irresistibletour.com use the coupon code Carey19, you also can get a discount for everybody who attends.

Carey Nieuwhof: We are back next week. I'm so excited for that. Thanks so much for listening guys. 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.