

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 282 of the podcast. My name is Carey Nieuwhof, and I hope our time together today helps you lead like never before. We are pushing in on five years of this show, and also 300 episodes. Just want to say thank you, thank you so much for tuning in. Thanks for subscribing. Thanks for sharing. We've got some fun ways to share the podcast too. It means the world to me when you leave ratings and reviews, and let us know that this matters. A lot of you email as well. If you ever want to get in touch, the email is [carey@careynieuwhof.com](mailto:carey@careynieuwhof.com). Thank you so much, guys. Just want to let you know how grateful I am.

Carey Nieuwhof: I'm really excited about today's podcast. I have known Joel Manby for a number of years now. He's got quite a remarkable career. He started out at age 35 as CEO of Saab USA. Moved to Greenlight, Amazon's brief moment where they sold cars, yeah, for real. We'll talk about that. Then was CEO of Herschend Entertainment, and then most recently CEO of SeaWorld. Yeah, took it on right after the Blackfish documentary was released. I flew down to Atlanta, and went to Joel's home and did this interview in person. It's a very personal interview.

Carey Nieuwhof: Joel is so honest about the personal cost of leadership. It cost him dearly at different points in his life. Also how to become resilient, and how to try to integrate biblical principles in the marketplace. It's just very honest, very real, and I hope you'll find it helpful. Joel and I talked a lot about the interview after. I thought it was really going to encourage a lot of you. Joel is just completely transparent about what was hard. There was really nothing that was easy. You guys are in leadership, you know that. I think you're really going to appreciate this. Joel is just a brilliant thinker and a brilliant mind.

Carey Nieuwhof: We have a pretty great retrospective of his remarkable time in leadership. Also the personal cost that that brought about, and what he's learned and what he's thinking about moving forward. I think you're really, really going to appreciate that. One of my goals here on the podcast is just to bring you honest conversations. This is one of them. Again, if you subscribe, you never miss anything. Sometimes, we drop two episodes per week. We'll be doing that again in August, so thank you for all of you who subscribe.

Carey Nieuwhof: Hey, really appreciate your support of our partners too, because they're doing everything they can to support you. One of the challenges I think most people have is graphic support. Online really is changing everything. What do you do? I thought to tell you about what Pro Media Fire does, why don't we talk to one of their clients? This is Tim Schmidt. He is the lead pastor, founding pastor of Journey Church in Rochester, New York. I sat down with Tim, and I asked him this question. I just said, "Tim, tell me, why did you decide to look outside your church to get help with media?" Here's what he had to say.

Tim Schmidt: I was constantly frustrated with having great ideas, but not being able to execute them. When you're dependent on a couple of people in a new church, sometimes it takes a long time to get things done, and it's just a constant frustration. I'm not the kind of person who is able to really follow up with people all the time, and just stay on them. I like to delegate a task, and know that that task is being done. That's what we found with Pro Media Fire, is that we could take any ideas that we had, give them a rough draft of it, and it was kind of like having a staff of really talented people that you could rely on. Once you give them a task, you know it's going to be done, you know it's going to be done right, and you don't have to think about it.

Carey Nieuwhof: That kind of makes sense, doesn't it? Well, if you need help with custom graphic design and video, yeah, this is not stock stuff, but you want custom stuff, go to Pro Media Fire. Listeners of this podcast get 10% off plans for life at [promediafire.com/carey](http://promediafire.com/carey). That's [promediafire.com/carey](http://promediafire.com/carey). Yeah, it is fall. Some of you, your ministry season is already back. Some of you like us, it's September. Well, what if you don't know where to start with volunteer training? Or if you do, is it hard to get everybody in the same place at the same time? Answer, yes.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, Ministry Grid makes it really simple to train every volunteer and leader in your church. They have a library now with over 3,500 videos, 800 courses, training for every ministry area and leadership level from volunteers, to ministry directors. Ministry Grid's scope and sequence of training makes it easy to know who needs what training. The best news, for the month of August, this month only, you get unlimited access to Ministry Grid for your entire church for \$399 a year. And you're locked in every year after that at that price if you choose to be. My church, Connexus Church, has been using Ministry Grid to help train our volunteers.

Carey Nieuwhof: I'm also helping them with some content too, so you're going to see me inside that. If you want to take advantage of this deal, here's what they're doing. I'm working on some exclusive courses, but if you purchase a subscription in the month of August, you get a copy of my latest book, *Didn't See It Coming*, as a bonus offer on top of a rare price of just \$399 a year. That's for your entire church, but you've got to lock it in this August. If you want to take advantage of this deal, just go to [ministrygrid.com/carey](http://ministrygrid.com/carey). You can get unlimited training for \$399 for your entire church, plus a copy of *Didn't See It Coming*. Once again, that's [ministrygrid.com/carey](http://ministrygrid.com/carey). Now, my heartfelt and meaningful, and I think very powerful conversation with Joel Manby. Joel, welcome to the podcast, it's great to have you.

Joel Manby: Thanks, Carey. It's great to be here.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, we're at your house.

Joel Manby: I'm excited.

Carey Nieuwhof: In Alpharetta.

Joel Manby: Alpharetta.

Carey Nieuwhof: We've had, we're pushing 300 episodes by the time this airs.

Joel Manby: Gosh, congratulations.

Carey Nieuwhof: Thank you.

Joel Manby: That's fantastic.

Carey Nieuwhof: It's been a lot of fun.

Joel Manby: That is fantastic.

Carey Nieuwhof: Not a lot of people have your CV. They really don't, your resume.

Joel Manby: Nope.

Carey Nieuwhof: You've served in four major corporations, and helped others including not-for-profit, one of my favorites that we'll talk about.

Joel Manby: Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof: Can you give us a quick history?

Joel Manby: Yeah, I would love to give you a quick history. If you don't mind, I'm going to include a little of my personal story too.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, yeah.

Joel Manby: Not just my professional story.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, you're Harvard MBA too.

Joel Manby: Well, some people shouldn't know that. It's not always helpful. I think one thing that's really relevant, is I grew up very modestly and very poor in a small town called Battle Creek, Michigan. My dad was a failed entrepreneur, factory worker. I want people to hear that, because there's a lot of young leaders listening to this, and sometimes they think they have to have special advantage or special opportunities. Really, everything that came my way, I either worked for or people just pointed me in the right direction. It was really helpful. I was able, as you said, went to Albion College and then to Harvard. I have to say, I had no clue that I wanted to be in business at first. In fact, I wanted to be a baseball player all through college. I got invited to a Detroit Tiger tryout camp.

Carey Nieuwhof: No way.

Joel Manby: Yeah, we had pretty good career-

Carey Nieuwhof: I grew up watching the Tigers. I was born in Windsor.

Joel Manby: The Tigers, actually the Cincinnati Reds too. The funny thing is, and I was a senior in college, it wasn't until I went to that tryout camp and went up against the 90 mile an hour pitchers, and I never even fouled off a pitch. I mean, I just was like a ceiling fan swinging at pitches. That was the first time I said, "Hey, I've got to get serious about academics, and really, really go there." I was going to be a lawyer at first, but I got the best advice ever from a lawyer who I worked for, for an internship. At the end of the internship, I said, "Do you think I should be a lawyer?"

Joel Manby: He said, "No," which surprised me. He said... And you're a football player. "Lawyers tend to be the referees. You're like a quarterback. You want to run things. You're a born leader. You should go into business." It was the best advice I ever got. That's why I went on to Harvard. For the listeners, it wasn't like I had this proactive strategy at 16 or 18 or 22 to go into business and be a CEO. A lot of CEOs will say that.

Joel Manby: I never sought out that job. I never sought out to be at that level. I just did the best I could at every level. The reason I went to General Motors, actually I was a deferred admit out of Albion, so I had two years before Harvard, General Motors was the only company that would pay for someone to go back and get their MBA. Since I was so poor, there was no way I was going to be able to afford tuition.

Carey Nieuwhof: So poor, I've heard you tell a story that you wanted to go for ice cream after winning a-

Joel Manby: Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof: Do you want to tell that story?

Joel Manby: Well, yeah, because it's... My dad worked really hard, and my dad loved me and I know he did. He had a failing tractor dealership, and they were running out of money it turns out now. My mom told me after he died that he bringing home about \$50 a week.

Carey Nieuwhof: This is in the '60s.

Joel Manby: Yeah, even in the '60s, that's about \$2,500 a year, so that's not much. I hit the game winning home run, whatever, and we were all going to go to A&W. That ages me right there. My dad wouldn't take me. The whole team went. I started

crying on the way home. I was crying in bed. My mom came in and I said, "Why doesn't dad love me? How can he not take me to the A&W?" She said, "We don't have any cash. He's trying to make payroll on Friday." There were many stories like that, that we could go to. I definitely had kind of a fear, almost a fear of failure or a fear that I wouldn't have enough because my parents didn't have enough, at least in my mind. Now the truth is, we never missed a meal. I had love. But I will tell you, that definitely influenced my trajectory.

Carey Nieuwhof: How so?

Joel Manby: I'm not sure I would have chosen business if I was just focused on where my heart was, honestly. If you look at my profile, it said I should have been a coach or a pastor, meaning my heart was really strong for other people. It wasn't so much about just the bottom line. Yet I was afraid of not making enough money. I hate to admit that, because I know that's not of God. That's not what Christ speaks about. It has been an Achilles heel. I wasn't trusting God enough to do what I felt maybe was in my heart.

Joel Manby: Now, I will tell you, I ended up loving my business career, but it wasn't until later, and we'll get to that, I know we'll talk about the Herschend experience. The first 20 years of my career, about 15 with General Motors, were very, very difficult. I kept thinking, there must be a better way to lead, a more caring way, a more loving way, and still get great financial results. It took me a long time to get there. Kind of finishing up the career-

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, yeah, just give us the bird's eye view, because we're going to drill down. It's pretty remarkable, especially given your background.

Joel Manby: I went to Harvard, and then we helped start Saturn Corporation. There was only four of us on the marketing team, and Saturn at the time was a really big bet with General Motors, that we can go into if you'd care.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, we will. You can still see a few on the road today, right?

Joel Manby: Yeah, it was an incredibly strong launch and really successful for about 10 years before the broader GM bankruptcy affected it. Because of the success of Saturn, I actually went on to Saab and was CEO of Saab North America at a very young age, at 35. It was really because of the success of Saturn. They wanted a Saturn person to run Saab, because Saturn had a so-so car with phenomenal marketing and phenomenal distribution. Saab had an amazing car with really mediocre distribution and really mediocre-

Carey Nieuwhof: And GM bought the Swedish company, right?

Joel Manby: Yes, they bought Saab, and then I went there and stayed. We had a really good set of years.

Carey Nieuwhof: So you're CEO at 35.

Joel Manby: Yeah, 35 of a major division of General Motors. Long story short, as most corporate promotions go, a lot of listeners know this, you get a promotion, and they added South America and Asia. A 5% raise, and now I'm on the road 80% of the time. I had three young kids. My wonderful wife, Marki, was saying, "Hey, I can't do this." So I asked to just take America back and let go of Asia. Those were like month at a time trips. My boss said, "No." In hindsight, I think I probably should have gone back and said, "I'm leaving if you don't do what I'm asking, because I can't do this anymore." At the same time he said no, a search firm called, and I went to a dot-com startup. It was actually Amazon's car tab. In 1999, you could buy a car on Amazon. Bezos was on our board. I mean, it was a phenomenal experience, which we can talk about if you want.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah we will. It was called Greenlight.

Joel Manby: Greenlight.com. It crashed and burned in the dot-com implosion. Well, we sold it, but we had to sell it basically.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, minutes later, implosion, yeah.

Joel Manby: Boom. Then, I was already on the board of Herschend Entertainment while I was at Saab. I was able to transition to the theme park business, and I spent 13 wonderful years there, which I'd love to talk about. That's where I really learned a loving work environment that's still very accountable could create great profitability. Then I was asked to go to SeaWorld about four years ago now. I stayed there almost three, resigned, which is an interesting story. Then now really spend my time as non-executive chair of Orange, which you're very involved in.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, we're spending tomorrow in meetings-

Joel Manby: Yes we are.

Carey Nieuwhof: ... with reThink, with Orange.

Joel Manby: Really, really, you've done so much for that organization. That's the long and short of the career side.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, and that's quite something. I mean, and you went to SeaWorld, just to put this in context, right after Blackfish was released.

Joel Manby: Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof: The air was coming out of the balloon quickly.

Joel Manby: Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof: I think their previous CEO, was he fired or did he resign?

Joel Manby: He was let go. I'm happy to go into that whole situation.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, just give us a broad context, because that's leadership under fire, my goodness.

Joel Manby: Basically, Blackfish, for those who don't know about it, was a documentary, a shockumentary that made SeaWorld look very, very bad. I loved SeaWorld, and I still hated them when I saw the documentary. It was so well done. It basically attributed the trainer's death to whales who are going crazy because they're in captivity. That's not true, but it is what it is. Sales at the SeaWorld facilities dropped in half.

Carey Nieuwhof: This was right next to Disney, right?

Joel Manby: Yeah. Profitability dropped in half. This is the big statistic, the trustworthiness of SeaWorld, 40% of the country had seen Blackfish. Can you imagine, 40%.

Carey Nieuwhof: 40%.

Joel Manby: It was run every week on CNN, who purports itself to be a news agency.

Carey Nieuwhof: But it debuted at the Sundance Film Festival, right?

Joel Manby: Yes, it did, it did.

Carey Nieuwhof: Then it got picked up.

Joel Manby: Then CNN bought it. What happened is our trustworthiness with the America public went from 65% top box score, best ever, down to 35% in a year and a half. The CEO was let go. He's a wonderful person. There's another side of that story. I probably shouldn't go down that path, but I don't know that the board either really realized the extent of the damage of Blackfish. I was recruited in, and my job was to reposition the brand, which I feel like we did incredibly well. It's known as an animal entertainment brand, Shamu.

Joel Manby: It was one of the biggest business paradoxes I've ever seen, when the very thing that puts you at the top and your brand was known for, Shamu, was also the biggest liability now. People weren't coming anymore because of that. We did some incredible work, and I'm very proud of a lot of things that we accomplished there. But in the end of the day, the trustworthiness came back. We ended Orca breeding. We repositioned the company as basically a purpose driven brand that we call park to planet. The numbers were coming back.

Joel Manby: Unfortunately, we had a bad '17, 90% of it could be attributed directly to hurricanes. I needed '17 personally to go up, and it went down. I think the board made a decision, we're probably going to have to make a change. Yet on my last day of work, we were up 12%, California was up 50%. I think if I had been given a little bit more time, the numbers came back very quickly. In a three year cycle business, anyone who runs a company with a three year cycle, meaning it takes three years to develop a theme park product, a ride or an attraction. I feel good about what I did there, but there's a lot more we could go into.

Carey Nieuwhof: And we will, but I think that's over two decades, two and a half decades of leadership at the senior level. I think there's a lot of resonance. I think sometimes if you're in ministry, which some of us are, you look at corporate and think, well wouldn't that be easy.

Joel Manby: Well, I never look at ministry and think, wouldn't that be easy. I'll tell you that.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, and you're heavily involved and have been for years at North Point Church, and have been an elder at North Point, and good friends with Andy Stanley and with Reggie Joiner.

Joel Manby: Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, this is an evening podcast interview, so really my specialty, Joel.

Joel Manby: Thanks for enduring.

Carey Nieuwhof: No worries, no worries. It was work setting this up. Anyway, in corporate too, we always hear about the great stories and then the crash stories, but there's a lot of struggle in the middle.

Joel Manby: Oh my gosh.

Carey Nieuwhof: And we're going to get into that. I want to go back, American auto industry, massive changes.

Joel Manby: Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof: Obviously that most of us have witnessed in our lifetime, even over the last decade. If you look at the great recession, that gutted the auto industry.

Joel Manby: Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof: You weren't at GM or Saab or Saturn at that time. Just leadership wise, what were some of the challenges, and let's go back to Saturn. I didn't realize the team was that small, four people.

Joel Manby: Well, the marketing team was.

Carey Nieuwhof: The marketing team was four people.

Joel Manby: The winner's team, yeah, yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah. This goes back to, was that the '80s that Saturn debuted?

Joel Manby: It was the '80s.

Carey Nieuwhof: Really? See, I remember the '80s, a lot of our listeners were born in the '80s or '90s.

Joel Manby: They weren't even born in the '80s.

Carey Nieuwhof: Or 2000s.

Joel Manby: They can still learn from it.

Carey Nieuwhof: They can still learn from it. To go way back, I remember when the Japanese, I don't remember this, but I remember reading about this, when the Japanese first came over, the products were terrible. My dad was involved in the auto industry as a tool and mold maker. He did a lot of lenses for car parts and that kind of thing, tail lights. I always felt like I kind of knew a little bit more about the auto industry than I should have. The Japanese were almost laughed out of the market. Then the products got good.

Joel Manby: Right.

Carey Nieuwhof: It's kind of like what happened with Hyundai or Kia.

Joel Manby: Exactly.

Carey Nieuwhof: All of a sudden they got good, so there was arrogance, hubris in the auto industry, particularly in Detroit where the big three said, "Ha, we rule the world." The next thing you knew, people are buying smaller cars. There's the environmental crisis, fuel crisis, oil crisis, and these small Japanese and foreign cars all of a sudden start to sell. GM comes along and says, "We need to do this differently." That's where they tapped you?

Joel Manby: Well, they tapped us for Saturn, yeah, I was part of it. You're exactly right. What basically happened is, no one was making money on the small car in the US manufacturing market. So they just gave it up to the Japanese, thinking, no one makes any money on it. It's not a big market. Well, then the gas crisis hit, and small cars became a huge market. GM, Ford, were way behind. Saturn was intended to be a quality breakthrough for small cars for the US manufacturers,

especially General Motors, to be price competitive, quality competitive. It was also meant to be a new labor contract agreement between the union and the management.

Joel Manby: You're right, there was hubris, there was also a lack of trust between the dealers and the executives, between the union and the executives. Looking back in hindsight, Saturn did, they were great at two things but not what was intended to happen. The manufacturing prowess, getting a better product out there, really didn't happen. It was a pretty average product. It scored so well because of the guest experience and the marketing and how it was positioned with the consumer. This is an interesting story I'll tell, because I think it's a good lesson for any leader.

Joel Manby: Some of the best ideas, best innovation comes through necessity. It's not just Steve Jobs thinking, hey, I'm going to do iTunes or make an iPod that's so breakthrough. In the Saturn case, I'll never forget this. I was 25, right out of business school. We were in a marketing meeting, figuring out how are we going to market this car? Marketing wasn't a big part of the idea. Again it was, it's just going to be a better car, and it's going to be a better contract. Well, we drove what called the mule car, which is what the engine and transmission is. You get to feel what the car is really going to feel like and look like. It was not good. It was leaking oil. It was noisy.

Joel Manby: We literally came back into the conference room at like 9:00 at night, and we were all just, bringing in hot dogs and pizza, and said, "We're going to be here for the next week trying to figure out what we're going to do, because we're going to get killed. The Japanese will kill us." In a nutshell, out of that meeting and those series of meetings, someone recommended, "Let's base it on the car experience. Forget the buying experience." Not the car itself, but the buying experience. Every car up until then, every ad was cars spinning around on wet pavement. That was the car ad of the 1980s.

Joel Manby: We were the first company to say, "We're going to make car buying fun, trustworthy. It should be one of the greatest experiences of your life, and we're going to make it that way." That was the impetus for what made Saturn so great. I think what I walk away from that experience was, A, I think the car industry is one of the most competitive, big, tough industries in the world, overcrowded with manufacturers from all over the world. Yet we still were able to carve out a niche. Any leader listening, I don't care what organization or business you're in, you can carve out a niche if you listen to the customer and find that niche. The customers hated car buying. That's the biggest thing I learned from Saturn.

Carey Nieuwhof: Wow. What did you change about the customer experience?

Joel Manby: We just basically made it no hassle, was the biggest thing.

Carey Nieuwhof: I'm trying to remember-

Joel Manby: It was, no haggle no hassle, was what it was called. People misunderstand that. They thought it always to be sticker price. It didn't, because the market dictates that, how hot is the car. Whatever the dealer put on the car that day, we called them retailers not dealers, that was what you were going to pay. When you came in with a trade-in, you were given one offer, and that's what they were going to give you. And your interest rate was based on a pre-established rate, and there was nothing hidden. The car buying experience is the worst retail experience I think on Earth, other than perhaps buying time share down in Florida. We were just trying to make it honest, like you would want to be treated, and like you'd want your mom to be treated. It really resonated with the consumers.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's good.

Joel Manby: That was the big thing about what Saturn was trying to do for the industry.

Carey Nieuwhof: So successful experience, successful marketing, not so much a successful product.

Joel Manby: Right. It did its job, but it wasn't known for being an amazing product. Then moving to Saab, like I said to you, it was because I was part of the Saturn team. That was a big, big break for me getting that kind of role at that young of an age.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, at 35 to be a CEO. What were your peers? Were they all like the other CEOs of the other divisions, Buick-

Joel Manby: Yeah, they were 50s or 60s, kind of my age now. All the people who worked for me were a lot older than me. That was a bit-

Carey Nieuwhof: How do you handle that? I get that question a lot from young leaders who are taking over and they have an older staff.

Joel Manby: You know, first of all, realize the situation, be humble. Don't have all the answers, and listen to them, ask questions. They know a lot. I ask a zillion questions. Probably one of my greatest skillsets is asking questions, and then shutting up and listening. I spend a lot more time, I think, listening than I do talking. That's the biggest thing. That's the biggest advice I could give on that.

Carey Nieuwhof: Wow. Thank you for that. Listen, show humility, and don't pretend you're 50 and have 30 years of experience.

Joel Manby: Right. And you don't have to tell them something or show them how smart you are. That's actually the last thing they want to see. You talked about the Harvard MBA. I ditched that diploma. I don't even know where it is.

Carey Nieuwhof: Mine are in a drawer.

Joel Manby: Yeah. They even teach you that at Harvard. Don't put your resume or your diploma on the wall. It isn't going to help. It doesn't. It's better they, whatever. The other thing about Saab that I would love to share for any listener, the thing I thought probably the best about there is we as a team didn't use conventional approaches. I think every leadership situation I've gone into, there's no play book. I'm very leery of people saying, "Well, I have a framework or a model that works every situation I go into." Every one of them is different. Models mean you kind of look at things the same way.

Joel Manby: That's fine to have them to start, but very quickly you have to see and listen and say, "This is the issue. This is the issue." If I went through each of my four COE experiences, what I was trying to accomplish was very different in each one. They're very, very different answers. At Saab, it was a completely muddled brand, and the dealership network was horrible. Everyone was dueled with like Nissan or Infinity, whereas all the other luxury import brands had exclusive facilities, exclusive people.

Joel Manby: Long story short, we completely restructured the network, and were counterintuitive, and actually took a third of the dealers out of the network, fired a third of them basically. Required the remaining 65% to do exclusive buildings and people. What ended up happening is we brought in a good car as well, called the 9-5. The overall network went up 67%, but since there was a third fewer of them, we doubled the sales per store, which created great profitability for them.

Joel Manby: Then they added exclusive dealerships, exclusive people. It was a really successful experiment. The executives at General Motors, the sales executives, their mantra was, "If you need more units, you add more dealers." Well if they're dueled, it doesn't really bring you much. My point to the listeners, don't necessarily listen. Use your instincts, make sure you see the problem, and every one's different.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's a good point. I mean, you're the CEO of Saab, but you're not the chairman or the CEO of General Motors.

Joel Manby: No.

Carey Nieuwhof: You've got superiors, you've got bosses, you've got a board.

Joel Manby: Yes, definitely.

Carey Nieuwhof: You've got a different philosophy than Detroit. How did you handle that?

Joel Manby: That's a great question. You always have to find one advocate. I found one advocate on the board, the Saab board, a guy Don Huddler, God bless his soul.

He was my biggest fan. He was actually the one that recommended me to be CEO of Saab. He believed in that strategy. That's kind of how Saturn did it. He argued on my behalf as a board member with the other board members. They just didn't know any better. You do have to have an advocate usually on the board. If they're all against you, or they all have different ideas, it's quite different.

Carey Nieuwhof: A lot of our leaders, whether it's the not-for-profit world, church world, or business world have boards. Isn't that politics?

Joel Manby: Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof: How do you do that in a way that-

Joel Manby: It's completely politics.

Carey Nieuwhof: Okay, so let's go there. What do you mean?

Joel Manby: Look, I think every senior pastor, every senior leader has to deal with a board. It's difficult, especially if the board members aren't senior in their mindset, not necessarily in their age, or if they're trying to prove something. The best board members I have found have been CEOs or leaders, senior pastors, having the number one role or having enough experience that they're not trying to prove something by their knowledge on the board. When you get board members who are trying to impress other board members with their knowledge, it's trouble quickly.

Joel Manby: My advice I would give to anybody... If we get to it, my biggest mistake at SeaWorld was I didn't move fast enough to coalesce a board that was supportive of my strategy. They were 100% turnover in that board, two chairmans. They all had different ideas, didn't have a strong chairman, the second one, that could help me coalesce the board. I had a lot more I think influence than I thought. I would encourage any pastor leaders, for profit leaders, you have more, I hate to use the word power because I hate that word.

Joel Manby: You have more authority and more backing than one might think. Since the SeaWorld numbers weren't great, I probably wasn't strong enough to say, "I need a better board. I need a board that will coalesce and not be..." It was very tough to keep the puppies in the box. But it is political. That's probably another mistake I made, is I was trying to focus so much on the business, I didn't focus enough on board relationships. I just assumed that I needed to just turn the numbers. There's only so many hours of the day.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's really helpful. If I can drill down on that a little bit more, Joel, whether you're thinking at SeaWorld. You're not the only CEO. I've talked to other CEOs of literally billion dollar companies plus, who said, "My fatal error was the board ousted me," or "squeezed me out," or "I left because it just got untenable."

They said, "I didn't pay enough attention to the board." These are people who lead major organizations. I talked to pastors and not-for-profits, they're like, "Yeah, the board and I are at odds. We're in trouble." I think this is a-

Joel Manby: Yeah, it's true. I don't care what the number of zeroes are at the end of the revenue, every number one leader of any organization, for profit or profit, I would say it's going to be on their top list of frustrations. It's very rare to have. At Herschend Entertainment, I had a phenomenal world class board. That's the best board I've ever served on. I've been on, I don't know, 12 or 14 different for profit, nonprofit boards roughly. I've seen enough that I think I know, and it's rare to find something that healthy.

Carey Nieuwhof: Let's talk about what a healthy relationship is. You had your friend Don back at Saab. I'm running everything you're saying through my filter of working with the board for over 20 years in leadership. I think the classic tension whenever this gets discussed is, on the one hand you have a board who has to hold you accountable, which kind of is their job. On the other hand, there are leaders who manipulate a board so that the board is a puppet board and in their pocket. People think, if I get too close to the board, am I manipulating the board? Am I trying to get yes people around the table? Can you talk about that tension?

Joel Manby: I will tell you, at least in my experience in the for profit world, I was never in a situation where there was a puppet board. It was always a board that they felt their role, and appropriately, to ask the very tough questions. But there has to be a balance. A board should ask really tough questions, but they also have to be supportive. The number one job, I think it's the toughest job, it was the biggest transition for me going from number two at Saturn to number one at Saab, was by far the biggest change and biggest surprise to me in going into leadership.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah. What did that look like? In the good board relationships that you had, did that mean, like for example I would always meet our elders outside of board meetings. We'd go for coffee, we'd go for breakfast, largely because we didn't have a building. We rarely held meetings at the church. We always held them in someone's home. It created a different context. I think that's something that actually went fairly well in my leadership, because we were able to have tough conversations, they were able to challenge me. There were times where I wanted to quit, and they said, "No, hang in there." There's a friendship or, and yet... I don't know, I'm trying to say, I don't think it was yes people, for sure. If you met them, they would be insulted by that.

Joel Manby: Right, yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof: "Oh, that's what you think?" No, but yet there was a camaraderie and a commitment to the mission. What were some things that you did that produced better relations with the board?

Joel Manby: Like you said, I think changing up the locations to a more informal, like having dinner the night before. Always break bread with your board. We did that at Herschend, where we broke bread. We actually didn't talk that much about business the night before. It was personal, it was relationship building. But then I would give an overview of what was going to be covered tomorrow, kind of found out what the big issues in their heads were so we could change or maybe prep a little bit better for the morning. When I was successful like at Herschend, I spent a lot more time one-on-one with them. Took them and broke bread, had coffee, flew down to see them maybe once or twice a year. I did none of that, or not enough of that at SeaWorld. It was just-

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, you were under siege.

Joel Manby: Yeah, we were under siege, under attack. You just lose time. I just think that you also need a really, really strong chairman who will help you... Really, the chairman's role is to help bring consensus of the board. You might have 12 people saying different things. It really shouldn't be the CEO's job to draw consensus. It should be the chairman speaking to the CEO when there's a dog's breakfast of ideas from the board. It really shouldn't be the CEO's job to try to parse all those 12 opinions, and go to them individually and get it. That could take years and cost thousands of dollars.

Carey Nieuwhof: Full-time job, yeah.

Joel Manby: Those are a couple things.

Carey Nieuwhof: No, that's good to know. I always find that it is good, like even having meetings in a home or a restaurant. You don't want to discuss confidential stuff in a restaurant, but that's interesting. The classic picture is you're sitting around this table, it feels clinical.

Joel Manby: Right.

Carey Nieuwhof: I don't know, people behave differently.

Joel Manby: They do behave differently. I do think you get more truthful conversations, the smaller the group could be.

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh yeah, do you have a theory on that? I do.

Joel Manby: Oh, definitely.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, what's your theory?

Joel Manby: Well, I think anything over 10, you're not going to get close to the truth.

Carey Nieuwhof: Right, so an ideal, you're putting a board together.

Joel Manby: Oh, ideal, I'd like to have five to six people.

Carey Nieuwhof: Bingo, me too.

Joel Manby: Or my senior team. I think senior teams of five-ish or six are the ideal number, but why do you think that?

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, I wanted to know about you, and then I'll go, I'll go.

Joel Manby: Because I think you have to have diversity of thought. You have to have enough for diversity, which everyone has to be able to speak. It just takes time through get to all the issues, and you can only have a deep, deep relationship I think with that many people. Now, Christ did it with 12, so maybe that's the max number. But he still had his inner circle.

Carey Nieuwhof: He did.

Joel Manby: He still had-

Carey Nieuwhof: He had his three.

Joel Manby: Peter, John, yeah. But why do you think?

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, no similar reasons. I just instinctively. I ended up, our churches were really small, but I had 18 elders. So 42 people in worship, adding all three churches together, 18 of whom were elders. It was just disasterville when I started. They were appointed for life, so I started praying for funerals. Sorry, that's sarcastic. No, then we moved to term service for elders.

Joel Manby: Oh my gosh.

Carey Nieuwhof: And I shrunk the board down. I got it down to about 11 or 12, but it was still unwieldy. Then when we launched Connexus, I started with three. Then we built it to five. I think, and sociologically I've studied this, you think of a dinner party, if you get more than six people at a dinner party, you end up with two conversations.

Joel Manby: Yeah, always.

Carey Nieuwhof: If you have five, you can have one conversation. You have six or seven, you start to move into two. You have seven or eight, you've got two conversations. I think that's what happens sociologically with a board as well. Really, if you're trying to create unity in the organization, you need five people with strong opinions,

different opinions, who are committed to the mission. But you have five or six in a room, I have the same number you do, interesting. That's my theory.

Joel Manby: Well, good.

Carey Nieuwhof: What did you learn about yourself when you became a CEO?

Joel Manby: Oh my gosh. That is such a great question. I'll tell you. I'll say I learned some really good things and some really not so good things.

Carey Nieuwhof: We all do.

Joel Manby: I found that I actually, as far as skills, was really good at cutting to the chase quickly, and just seeing complex situations and being able to see through it quite quickly. Although every time I go in, I had a good format of, I would listen for 90 days and do very little, "Here's my strategy." Then we'd come up with a strategy as a team. Once we got it, boy, we would move fast and hard. I found out I was pretty good at that, and kind of cutting through all the chaff, so to speak. Figure out what the key issues were.

Joel Manby: I think because my dad was blue collar and we grew up on the lower side of the tracks, I was always good at being able to talk to the chairman but also the frontline worker. That differentiated me from a lot of different people. What I found I was really bad at was setting boundaries, and I listened too much to too many different people. I cared too much about what the external world thought.

Joel Manby: In the end of the day, we'll get to this, and this is a big point to make, I believe it cost me my marriage. I listened to too many different voices. I worked too long. I didn't fulfill that commitment in my marriage. I should have listened always to my internal voice and not the voice of anybody else. Those were the things that are big learnings for me. Some of them took 20 years to learn. Some of them I knew right away.

Carey Nieuwhof: Since you raised it, can we talk about that a little bit, the commitment to overworking and everything? As I reread your book, Love Works, which you wrote in 2012?

Joel Manby: Yep.

Carey Nieuwhof: You were still married.

Joel Manby: Yep.

Carey Nieuwhof: Then that in the SeaWorld years kind of didn't survive.

Joel Manby: Right.

Carey Nieuwhof: What were some of the factors, if you can just explore that a little bit to the degree that you're comfortable that led, because I think we all face that. I suffered with workaholism. It put pressure on my marriage. That was unhealthy, and I had to learn how to draw boundaries. It's hard. I was dealing with a tenth to a hundredth of the pressure that you were under.

Joel Manby: At a very macro level, the book Love Works, and we'll get into that, it's a book about leadership under the definition of love, love the verb that's in the bible. The last word in that book is dedication to the rest of the values. As I wrote it, as I thought about it, it was completely in the work context. I wasn't writing about it for my personal relationships. In hindsight, that entire dedication chapter should have been in bold. My own failures as a leader and as a husband were either, I wasn't always truthful. No one goes in and says, "I'm going to lie," but we stretch the truth, or we are afraid.

Joel Manby: When I say I was externally focused, I was afraid to tell my own wife some of the mistakes I had made because I was afraid of how she would react. Because I did that, and then she found out the truth not through me, the trust is gone. If I had just said, "I know I was wrong, and I'm going to tell her I was wrong, and we're going to correct the situation," I still think I would probably be married. The same thing is probably, I know it's true in the business world. With my SeaWorld board, which was dysfunctional, with a lot of different people changing in and out, 100% turnover, I was listening to too many different voices versus just saying, "You two are giving me completely different strategies of the last board."

Joel Manby: It was, and I can go into it if I had time, but completely different inputs of what we should be doing because they wanted faster traction. I should have said, "I know what the internal truthfulness is here. I'm going to stick to what I know is true, what I know is right. If you guys want to fire me, fire me." So both in my personal life and my professional life, both happening at SeaWorld, I think if I had been completely truthful, then I might even be at both places still. I might still have my marriage, and I might still have my job. I'd much rather have my marriage.

Joel Manby: I will tell anybody on this podcast, you will be faced with working too much, not having date nights, whatever the mistake is. Everyone is going to be faced with a chance to work too much, to have attraction from other people, to be able to engage in other relationships that are in some way inappropriate, everyone is going to be faced with that. It is not listening to any external voice, whether that voice is people's attention feels good, or the board's attention feels good, none of that should matter. It is what's right to your own value set. If that means getting fired, then that's fine. I know that's hard for a 30 or 35-year-old person to hear, that hasn't been a CEO yet, or wants to make a lot of money or have wealth.

Joel Manby: I can say at the other end of that, at 60, none of that really does matter. All the four CEO opportunities, that's great, and I've enjoyed it and I've learned a lot, and I would love to help other leaders. But nothing compared to not living to the vows, or allowing a marriage to unfold and break up is by far worse. I don't know if that will help anybody, but I almost plead to people to not let the world's demands hurt your relationships with your spouse.

Carey Nieuwhof: What do you think, looking back on it, kept you from telling the truth to Marki, to the board, even doing what you kind of knew. It's not like you didn't know, you knew.

Joel Manby: Right.

Carey Nieuwhof: What do you think that was?

Joel Manby: Have you done any podcasts on the Enneagram?

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh yeah, yeah, we've done a few. I'm an eight, what are you?

Joel Manby: Okay, so. I'm a three.

Carey Nieuwhof: You're a three, yeah.

Joel Manby: The three's mortal sin, and we all have a mortal sin. When I'm healthy, I'm an inspirational leader. If I'm unhealthy, because I'm too tired or whatever the reason, I can sell so much that it can almost turn to being a deceitful thing. It's not a lie, as much as it's omission maybe. I am so worried about people's reaction that there's not an internal clock saying, "It doesn't matter what their reaction is. This is what's right." In the case with Marki, I shouldn't worry about what she might think. "Here's the truth. You have to make your own decision." Or to the board, "Here's the absolute truth. You guys are dysfunctional. You're not helping me. I need you to coalesce around this strategy or approve a different one, because we're not making traction fast enough." If they don't like that-

Carey Nieuwhof: But you were afraid to put your leadership on the line in those moments.

Joel Manby: Right, because our numbers weren't good, right? Our numbers weren't good, so you feel a little bit not confident enough, even though I'm very confident in my leadership and the numbers were starting to turn. I hope I articulate it right, whether it's personal or professional, whatever set of values you have, that internal clock has to win. That internal compass has to win. Not what anybody in the world is thinking. I actually think it's an epidemic in our society, with Facebook, with social media, with Instagram, whatever it is. It's been proven, when people get likes it's almost like an endorphin.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, there's a dopamine, or whatever that is.

Joel Manby: It's a high, yeah a dopamine, right.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, there's a high.

Joel Manby: These kids who are looking at other kids who only show the best part of life, no wonder suicide rates are going up and depression's going up with young children. I think we have to listen to that internal clock, that internal set of values.

Carey Nieuwhof: You talked about boundaries, and workaholism. You've written openly in your book that sometimes you can turn to alcohol or you can turn to other unhealthy vices. Tell us about the boundary struggles, that pressure in that top seat brings. There's a lot of second chair leaders listening and others listening, but there's a lot of people who are really ultimately the CEO, the senior leader of the organization listening. Tell us about those boundaries.

Joel Manby: Well, first of all, I'll say I haven't always been good at it. Herschend, it was incredible, 13 years and I never got to a stress situation where I think I crossed any boundaries. But at SeaWorld, I will say it was seven days a week, sometimes 20 hours a day, seven days a week. I would get calls at all hours of the day from board members and even executives. Especially as my wife and I separated, I did start to drink, because I was in pain. What I learned through counseling, and it helped me so much... For anybody else who goes through that, the alcohol doesn't help. It actually makes it work. It's a depressant. This is the best quote I got from my counselor. "Do what makes you feel good about yourself, not what makes you feel good." Whether it's drinking or a drug or-

Carey Nieuwhof: That's good. Eating can be, I think overeating is-

Joel Manby: Yeah, overeating. Whatever the vice is that people feel like they need for the pain, it doesn't help. Tea at night, not a scotch, has helped me get back to where I'm doing things to feel good about myself, and not using something to mask some pain because I'm losing my marriage and I knew I was on my way out of Saab, or SeaWorld, sorry.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah. Well, and Saab was tough too. I mean, you write about that in Love Works. Do you think it's possible to have a reasonably balanced life? I don't even like the word balanced. I don't know why I use that, but a life with some boundaries where you are actually home one day a week, and handle that level of responsibility. Or you think, no, leadership at that level is just, that's a deal with the devil.

Joel Manby: I wish I could give you a crisp answer.

Carey Nieuwhof: I don't think there is.

- Joel Manby: I would say in a public company, I'm not sure that you can. Between the analysts, and the board, and the travel, it is an all-consuming job.
- Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, and explain for those who are not familiar maybe with publicly traded companies versus privately held, the additional pressure. Herschend was privately held.
- Joel Manby: Yeah, Herschend, and there was certainly pressure from the board to perform and grow, but that's all you had to focus on. You could spend 60, 50, 70 hours a week on improving the business. At SeaWorld, the amount of distractions... If you don't mind me going there for just a minute.
- Carey Nieuwhof: No, we should.
- Joel Manby: We have first of all a company that's in turmoil. My first 30 days at work, PETAgate broke, where one of our employees had been spying on PETA. They weren't anymore, but I didn't know about it. I had just gotten there. We had a \$2 million legal investigation. We had to fire a bunch of people. I couldn't delegate it, because my chief counsel and COO were part of the investigation. I was the only one that could handle it. Then we got into a Justice Department investigation. Literally, the Department of Justice was there almost every week interviewing our employees.
- Joel Manby: SEC investigation for the previous executives possibly misleading the public. We had the protests at our parks, protests at my house by the animal activists. It went on and on and on. That's just the tip of the iceberg. And you have to deal with analysts, to talk to them every quarter about how you're doing. You have a board meeting every quarter, and probably once a month in between with audit committees. All that stuff takes you away from running the business. To me, my biggest mistake other than not managing the board at SeaWorld better was I should have forced delegation of those issues. In some cases I couldn't, because the people I should have delegated to were part of the investigation.
- Carey Nieuwhof: Were part of the investigation, yeah. Well, and there's the pressure that your share price is going up and down. You think of it as an investor, if you invest at all. It's like, Apple shares are down 3% because they missed targets by .3%. It's crazy pressure on the stock price, right?
- Joel Manby: Yeah, it's way, our whole system, that's a whole another conversation we don't have time for. But our whole financial system, based on 90 days earnings reports, is a very broken system.
- Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah. Anything else? Any other, looking back on it, lessons from... Herschend was really kind of a big success story in many ways.
- Joel Manby: Well, Herschend, I will say to anybody who knows Jack and Pete Herschend and the family, they're the best owners I've ever seen.

Carey Nieuwhof: Tell us what they do, the parks-

Joel Manby: They're one of the largest private theme park companies in the world. I think they're ninth largest in the world. We owned at the time a lot of stuff in Branson, Missouri, Silver Dollar City. We are the non-music partner of Dolly Parton, so all of her theme parks, dinner theaters. She's a wonderful, wonderful lady. We purchased the Harlem Globe Trotters. It's a very diversified-

Carey Nieuwhof: Stone Mountain in Atlanta, is that yours as well?

Joel Manby: Yes, yes. But here's the big, if we run out of time here, the big other thing I would love for the listeners to understand is, when I talked about those struggling years at General Motors, that was almost 20 years of feeling like there has to be a different way. It just has to be different than this. It was so autocratic and fear based, and a bunch of cigar smoking, swearing executives. It was really 1960s in the 1980s. It was the Herschends, that when I came there, when Greenlight was sold I didn't want to go back to the auto industry, so Jack asked me to be the president there.

Joel Manby: They taught me how to love people, love the verb not love the emotion, and still create unbelievable results. If you looked at Herschend versus any public or private theme park company, their margins are just as good, their returns are just as good. Their turnover is almost nonexistent. It's because of that culture. What I did there, the only thing I can take credit for is not building the culture but to put a vernacular to it. We called it, Love Works. That's what I wrote the book about. I would encourage anybody who has any of that angst in their soul that leadership should be more caring. Basically, if you care about people, I think it is a book that would be helpful to people to read.

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh yeah, no I reread it. I read it when it came out, and I reread it getting ready for this interview. It's a great book. It's a challenging book. The fact that you can't flawlessly execute it all the time doesn't mean it's not a great book. Churches are not automatically loving. I mean, churches can have some of the most toxic workplaces out there. It's not just corporate America.

Joel Manby: Well, actually, I think the rest... I feel a calling from God. If God continues to put this on my heart, I actually want to focus the most in helping pastors and churches put Love Works into place. My point of view, I've spoken at a few, like reThink Leadership that you organize and run.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, you and I have done some stuff together.

Joel Manby: When I ask people to raise their hand if they have any kind of Love Works, or any kind of measurement system of how people behave, nobody raises their hands. They're so focused on loving the congregation, sometimes the staff and employees aren't focused on enough. The basic premise is, a do goal versus a be goal. All organizations, non-profit or profit, have do goals. You've got to hit so

many church attendees, or you have to profit attendance. You've got to hit the numbers, basically. Everybody has that.

Joel Manby: Very few companies actually have processes and systems behind what we call at Herschend and the SeaWorld the be goals. What kind of leader do I want to be? Everybody puts it up on the mantel, here are our values. They put it on a billboard or on a poster. That's not what we're talking about here. There's a whole system behind it, there's processes, there's measurements, there's discussions with employees. At Herschend and at SeaWorld, half of people's raises were based on the be goals not just their do goal results.

Carey Nieuwhof: Give me an example of a be goal, and you mean B-E, right? Like to be.

Joel Manby: Yeah, I mean the be. The do goals, all the numbers. The be goal would be, actually in Love Works we paraphrase seven words that represent the definition of love. Those are the be goals. Love is patient. This comes from First Corinthians 13. Love is patient. That's one of the words. Love is kind. Love is forgiving. Love is trusting. Love is truthful. Love is dedicated. Every one of those words had sub-behaviors that we would talk about with our employees. For instance, if you're going to be truthful, have you had a difficult conversation with an employee lately?

Joel Manby: As an employee, are you willing to be truthful with your boss without fear of retribution? These are specific things we ask, and people are rated on that. That's how we hopefully get a truthful environment. Does your boss speak last in meetings? Because you're not ever going to get the truth if you speak first, right? Then we measure, have a discussion about it, and would go to the raise. What the book goes into is not just a philosophy. It goes into actual processes to some degree, at least at a high enough level that people can understand it. That's the magic of what Herschend did versus just putting it on the wall. It became part of the ethos, and very, very reinforced by senior management and the board.

Carey Nieuwhof: Let's talk about how it worked. At Herschend, what were some of the practical tangible expressions, both in your leadership and in the team, and the thousands of employees you had in the parks? How did that actually play out where it became a healthier culture and a culture where it was love based leadership?

Joel Manby: That could be a really long answer. The really short answer will be, the number one metric we were looking for is engagement of the employee. Unfortunately in America... When I say top box out of four, you're getting a four and the worst would be a one. In America, and this is a 30 year kind of flat trend, only 35% of Americans are top box engaged in their work. It's gone up slightly the last three years because of the hot economy, and people aren't trading jobs. At Herschend, we would buy parks. I can tell you right here at Stone Mountain in Atlanta, Georgia, when we came in the top box engagement score was 17%.

Carey Nieuwhof: These are people who are phoning it in.

Joel Manby: They're phoning it in.

Carey Nieuwhof: They don't care. I've got a crappy job.

Joel Manby: They probably have two side jobs, moonlighting.

Carey Nieuwhof: I hate it.

Joel Manby: They're working two or three jobs.

Carey Nieuwhof: Give me my \$13 an hour, and I'm out of here.

Joel Manby: Yeah, well, I wish it was \$13.

Carey Nieuwhof: Whatever, whatever.

Joel Manby: It is now, but it wasn't then. Within three years, it had gotten to 65%. When I left, it was at 80% top box. That's world class.

Carey Nieuwhof: What do you mean by top box?

Joel Manby: Meaning just that 80% of the employees said they were fully engaged in their work. One out of four, they were a four, meaning we are completely engaged. We love our job. And turnover went down. Then of course profitability goes up.

Carey Nieuwhof: Of course.

Joel Manby: It happens to be what's good for the business too.

Carey Nieuwhof: How do you do that? I mean, let's go into a little more detail. I'm a gate attendant. All I do is see whether you're tall enough to take the ride. I'm making minimum wage, which was, forgive me I'm Canadian, what would it have been roughly?

Joel Manby: At that time, it would have been \$7.50, \$8 an hour.

Carey Nieuwhof: So \$7.50 an hour. I'm barely paying my gas to get here. I hate my job. It's hot. If I got a better job, I'm gone tomorrow. How do you motivate me?

Joel Manby: There are a lot of factors. I wish I could give you a silver bullet.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, yeah, no. You did some things. I mean, it went from 17 to 80?

Joel Manby: The first thing is to put a measurement in place. That's just asking the employees at least once a year, now we actually did it every quarter if it was a bad performing property, ask them how they feel. We had the six key things that the Gallup organization, they're the ones that measure this engagement score nationwide. What are the six things that take engagement up? I don't have time to go into those, but there's six key questions. We would track that by supervisor, by employee.

Joel Manby: We knew everywhere in the company where the problems were. It's always leadership. It's always leadership. Then we would do something about it when the scores were bad. Every 90 days, we'd go back in with SurveyMonkey and make sure the scores were improving. If they weren't the leader was gone. One big fallacy about Love Works is, there is a high, high commitment to performance. You've just got to have an honest conversation.

Carey Nieuwhof: So it's not just, well just love them, or whatever.

Joel Manby: No.

Carey Nieuwhof: It's all okay.

Joel Manby: No.

Carey Nieuwhof: Okay, so how-

Joel Manby: Well we measure them, then they were able to in that six questions they're basically also kind of grading their boss, so to speak. They would get raises and bonuses based on how they were doing with the Love Works when they got reviewed. Then we also started a foundation. I know every company can't do this. When I was on Undercover Boss, that was a big thing that we were pushing.

Carey Nieuwhof: Is that still out there? Do you know?

Joel Manby: I don't think the show's still on.

Carey Nieuwhof: No, no, it's not on, but I wonder if it's on YouTube or something-

Joel Manby: Oh, the foundation? Oh yeah, it's out on Netflix.

Carey Nieuwhof: Because we'll link to the episode. You were one of the first ones on.

Joel Manby: The first season.

Carey Nieuwhof: The first season of Undercover Boss.

Joel Manby: Episode six of the first season.

Carey Nieuwhof: Hold on.

Joel Manby: It portrays that foundation where, this is an interesting concept. Nothing happens unless the employee gives a dollar, then we would match it as the company. Actually, the owners, the Herschends match it. So one became three. All that money was used to help the employees in need. It started to spiral up. This was before Obamacare, so there were a lot of them, like the part-timers, didn't have benefits. We used this pool of money to help them when they were in trouble. What happens is, where else would they go where there's a foundation to help them? They're getting bonuses they are getting at other properties. We tried to be competitive with wages, at least median to everybody else. It takes three years though. It's not a silver bullet. All of a sudden, it starts to spiral up.

Carey Nieuwhof: How do you get me, and I hear that. That's highly motivating. How do you get me to care about the guest? How do you get me to say, "Wow. This is actually another human being I'm interacting with." It's not like, hey, I've only 45 minutes till my break.

Joel Manby: Because that's how they're graded. We had a simple one page-

Carey Nieuwhof: So you measure it.

Joel Manby: A seasonal person, you can get guest scores at least down to kind of department areas, not to a person usually. They got more, they were paid more, they got bonuses, or they were retained because they were good with the customer. We celebrated the heck out of it. If you helped the customer in an abnormal way, we would have monthly celebrations. I would fly in for the big annual celebration. We just made a very, very big deal about guest experience.

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh, that's great. As Andy says, our mutual friend, Andy Stanley, "What you celebrate gets repeated."

Joel Manby: Yes, and we celebrated that like crazy.

Carey Nieuwhof: Okay, so let's take those principles to SeaWorld. Again, you've got really high employee engagement, great board, you're in a reasonably good place personally when you're at Herschend?

Joel Manby: Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof: Those principles are working for you in your own life?

Joel Manby: Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof: Is that fair?

Joel Manby: Yes, definitely fair.

Carey Nieuwhof: All right. Then you go to SeaWorld, and you try to apply the same things. It's less than three years, so we don't really have the turnaround window. Talk about how the Love Works principles worked, and then maybe how they didn't work as well when you were at SeaWorld.

Joel Manby: Yeah, that's an obvious question in a way, because a public company, a lot of people think it can't happen in a public company. I actually fully believe it can. There's many examples where it has. I know that you've probably talked to Cheryl Bachelder when she was at Popeyes.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, she's been on here. You're on the board at Popeyes.

Joel Manby: Yep. We've sold that company now, so the board doesn't exist anymore. She did a phenomenal job in a public company. Every metric at SeaWorld that is about the employee engagement improved every year we were there, with the exception of one property. That went down one year and then it came back up again. For the whole corporation, it went up. The issue at the frontline, all of the processes were working. What wasn't working really was support from the board. It's not that they didn't support it, it was they wanted the numbers and quickly. Although I went in saying it would take at least three maybe five years, I was not even there three years. I do think there was an underestimation of how long it would take. It wasn't a big part of what they wanted. I think this is not about the board. They were doing their fiduciary responsible.

Carey Nieuwhof: It's a values clash.

Joel Manby: It's also the way the markets are set up. The public markets don't reward a company helping in other ways. I think that's a problem. That's a whole different conversation, is that I believe stakeholders are not just the shareholders. If you're looking at only the shareholder, all you're doing is maximizing profit in the short-term. I frankly feel any fool can go in and do the wrong thing and increase profit really quickly. You cut costs, you take out quality, you don't pay people enough.

Joel Manby: For two or three years, you'll get by, but people will start to leave, the customer won't come back because the quality is worse. We've seen it in every industry. That's where I think the 90 day horizon in the public market is just not set up properly to do the right thing for the long-term. That was more of the conflict at SeaWorld than, it wasn't that the board didn't want to treat employees well. It was that, hey, you've got to get the numbers up now, not two years from now. That's more of a public market issue.

Carey Nieuwhof: But you did see some aspects, if I read my notes right, of employee engagement and satisfaction went up while you were there at SeaWorld.

Joel Manby: Oh yeah, absolutely. Not only our guest scores went up, but changing our employee brand to being a purpose driven brand, the millennials loved being part of SeaWorld. They could take one day a year, do turtle walks. They could do trash pickups. They were part of a company that was all about helping oceans marine animals. Once they understood that, they loved working for the company. We were able to compete with a Disney and Universal that paid a lot more per hour, because they were working for a cause. That's a good thing.

Carey Nieuwhof: We've had a great conversation. I really appreciate your honesty, thank you.

Joel Manby: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Carey Nieuwhof: I think these kinds of conversations are so helpful. I think some people would be too afraid to see themselves in the mirror. I think back to myself at different points. I needed conversations like these, and they're hard to find. So thank you, Joel.

Joel Manby: Well, you're welcome. I think it's important that leaders know that it is lonely, it can be hard at times. I know you've gone through a really tough time and came out better because of it. I'm doing the same thing. I think everybody goes through that in life. It's important that they know that. Everyone goes through it.

Carey Nieuwhof: We talked about the rhythms and disciplines and habits that maybe weren't very functional, and didn't serve you or your family, or ultimately God particularly well. You've had about 18 months now since you existed SeaWorld, and we're here in your home. You've got some new habits. You took me upstairs, and you showed me a really cool space that you've kind of designed for yourself. Tell me about that.

Joel Manby: The greatest thing about not being a public company CEO is having more time. I love music. I'm playing a lot more music, piano. My brothers and I are in a band called the Berlin Airlift. We get together once a year for reunions, ever since my parents died. Love doing that. I love spending every morning, not every morning, but every morning where I'm not on an airplane, kind of half an hour just reading the bible, praying, reflecting, writing down my mistakes from yesterday, a reflective life. Every time I've gotten in trouble, whether it's medicating, whether it's just doing the wrong thing, I can always tie it back to I wasn't having my quiet time, my prayer time.

Joel Manby: I started forgetting that the only audience I should be pleasing is God. It's a very simple formula. It's just harder than heck to do. Sometimes our actions are like, we almost are acting like God's not there. Do we really believe He's there when we're acting like He's not? When I'm in His word every day, and praying and

communicating, I don't forget during the day that He's there. I know that's kind of one-on-one stuff, but I can definitely point to getting away from that. That's a really good rhythm.

Carey Nieuwhof: Did you have that rhythm in seasons when you were in corporate?

Joel Manby: Yeah, oh of course.

Carey Nieuwhof: And then things went better at home. Things went better at work.

Joel Manby: I can directly link it to a lack of my own spiritual health, quiet times. Whether it's hanging with my friends, my accountability group, my church, it really does make a difference. I think that's why, I'm saying this and I'm willing to be vulnerable. I think one of the greatest failings of senior leaders, and pastors are right at the top of the list, is getting isolated and feeling like they can't share what they're going through. It will go badly if they don't share, if they don't have a cohort to talk to, if they don't find other leaders. It usually can't be your board, because no one wants to go to their board and say, "I'm really struggling."

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, "Well, you're done Friday. Clean out your desk."

Joel Manby: That's right. "I don't want to hear your problems. Just solve our problems."

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah. That's true.

Joel Manby: That's probably the healthiest-

Carey Nieuwhof: How did you cultivate that? Now it's a little bit easier. You're back in Atlanta. You've got some time.

Joel Manby: Right, no doubt about it.

Carey Nieuwhof: You can play music in the morning. You've got a picture of your small group here in your living room. When you were successful, cultivating community, when you were in corporate, how did you do it?

Joel Manby: It's just priority. The truth is-

Carey Nieuwhof: What was it like? Was it a small group? Was it, like how?

Joel Manby: Oh, it was, I have an accountability group for 35, well actually no, ever since Harvard, so however long that's been, about 40 years. We talk every month by phone. We've never missed a phone call until recently. There's reasons for that. I would recommend that to anybody. I have someone local too. But this group, we've known each other for all these years, and we share everything. They've

held me accountable. When I've made mistakes, we've ostracized each other. It's just like, "When you get your act together, you can come back on these calls." It's a very good strict group.

Carey Nieuwhof: At the bottom, they weren't calling you and you were telling them the truth?

Joel Manby: Yeah, well, not soon enough. I eventually did, but I wasn't truthful immediately.

Carey Nieuwhof: Guy, there's some stuff I've been hiding.

Joel Manby: Yeah. Don't do that. They would have loved me either way, but I wasn't truthful immediately. And, man, it doesn't get any better. It only gets worse. When you ask about rhythms, I'd have to say it's the accountability group, it's the quiet time in the morning. I wish I had never left those things, but I just want to encourage people. You'll go through down times, but you can always make your way back up. You can't do everything, but you can do the important things.

Carey Nieuwhof: When you look at, because this is a sojourn in your life, you want to continue to do some other things as you look ahead. Whether that's in corporate or not-for-profit world, or working with churches, or writing other books and that kind of stuff. Are there some rhythms that you think, okay, these are now non-negotiable? I'm going to assume scripture, that quiet time in the morning, accountability. Any other rhythms, disciplines, or strategies that you're like, yeah, going forward this is different?

Joel Manby: Yeah, where I am, that's a great question, Carey. Where I am right now, I said it before but not very articulately, it's the internal clock. It's the internal values. When something happens in my intuition or my gut, or something I say or a lack of forgiveness, or I'm angry at somebody, I have to deal with it and not worry about what that person thinks. Just say, "I'm upset at this. This is what happened. Why," or, "I did this wrong. You need to know," whatever it is. That's the rhythm that if you or any listener wants to pray for me, it is-

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, oh we will.

Joel Manby: ... to listen to that internal clock, and as a three on the Enneagram, not listen to the external voices that I'm trying to please for God knows why. They're not my God, and they're not my family. For some reason, I have tried to please too many voices. That's the new rhythm that I am very excited about. Whatever years God gives me left, I'm not going to mess that up.

Carey Nieuwhof: Wow. Well, this is what they don't teach you at Harvard. Fair enough?

Joel Manby: I was going to write a book. Actually, remember the book, What They Don't Teach You at Harvard that guy wrote?

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah.

Joel Manby: I was going to teach what they do teach, and what's wrong with it, but it's too late.

Carey Nieuwhof: Joel, you've been so transparent. It's so helpful. I would highly recommend your book, Love Works.

Joel Manby: Well, thank you.

Carey Nieuwhof: It does stand, and you've got nuance and context, despite the struggles of the last few years. I think we're all being tested all the time, and the struggles of yesterday will not be the struggles of tomorrow.

Joel Manby: Well, I appreciate-

Carey Nieuwhof: It's a joy to sit here with you. You helped a lot of leaders, as vulnerable, open as you were. As painful I'm sure as talking about some of this stuff was, it's getting conversations out there. That was sort of the heartbeat of my idea behind this podcast, because you're not alone. Everybody looks at everyone else and says, "Well, they don't have any problems." The reality is, we all do, and if can share them, we can help each other. So, thank you.

Joel Manby: Well, thank you, and keep doing what you're doing. You're doing a great job at it.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, thanks. Where can people find you online if they want to try to get-

Joel Manby: I think Instagram would be the best. I post there, and I will start doing more.

Carey Nieuwhof: We will link to that.

Joel Manby: All right, okay. Great.

Carey Nieuwhof: Joel, thank you.

Joel Manby: Thanks, Carey, appreciate it.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, that's one of the reasons I am so glad we're doing this podcast. I really think, content is everywhere, ideas are everywhere. You guys, you're reading books, you're looking at TED talks. I get it. But where do you really have conversations like this? Joel, I just want to say thank you again publicly for your vulnerability, your honesty. We do have transcripts. We have show notes. You can find everything at [careynieuwhof.com/episode282](http://careynieuwhof.com/episode282), and of course it's free to you.

Carey Nieuwhof: Also, thanks to our partners, Pro Media Fire. If you haven't checked them out yet, make sure you head on over to [promediafire.com/carey](http://promediafire.com/carey), get 10% off for life. And Ministry Grid, from LifeWay, you can go to [ministrygrid.com/carey](http://ministrygrid.com/carey), there's an August special. All of Ministry Grid training for your staff for \$399 for the entire year, plus a copy of my latest book, *Didn't See It Coming*. If you haven't read it, great. If not, now you've got a copy to give away or share with somebody.

Carey Nieuwhof: We are back with a fresh episode again next week. It's another powerful conversation. I'm spending more time on the road doing these in person. I find personally that the more I can do these interviews in person, the better they tend to go. Not that there's anything wrong when you do them by video. I sat down with Lee Kricher and Jason Howard. Lee is the founding pastor of Amplify Church in Pittsburgh. Jason is his successor. Another powerful behind the scenes interview on succession, and particularly the emotions of pastoral succession. Why leaders hang on too long, and why successors are afraid to talk about the real issues. Here's an excerpt.

Jason Howard: I thought, I don't want to do that. That was my first reaction. I don't see myself doing that.

Carey Nieuwhof: And you're how old at this point, 40?

Jason Howard: No, I was not even 25 probably.

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh wow.

Jason Howard: I'm like, I want to sing. I want to lead worship. I want to do creative stuff. I don't see myself in that role. I was in a crisis, because here is my leader, who I'm called to serve, who is asking me to step into something that I'm not comfortable stepping into. I have got a crisis. Am I going to listen to what I want to do, or am I going to listen to the voice of, I'm going to faithfully serve in whatever capacity I'm asked? Honestly, we had this conversation, and finally, I don't know a few months later, Lee is like, "Listen, I've got a board meeting. I'm going to propose you as the successor. I'd sure like to know whether or not you're in line with this."

Carey Nieuwhof: All right, so that's next week. Again, another powerful very real interview. Also coming up on the podcast, we have John Townsend, Christy Wright, J.D. Greear, David Kinnaman, David Platt, Max Lucado, Louie Giglio, Gordon MacDonald, Patrick Lencioni. I'm flying to San Francisco to hang out with Patrick at The Table Group. It's going to be great. We have Albert Tate coming up, N.T. Wright. I can't tell you how stinking excited I am about the opportunity to interview someone that people will be reading a hundred years from now.

Carey Nieuwhof: All that's coming up on the podcast. Again, guys, thank you so much for making this journey more than we could ask or imagine when we started this thing

almost five years ago. Yeah, who knew that it would end up being what it has become? It's a joy to be able to do this with you. I hope your summer/early fall is going well, and we'll catch you on the next episode. Thanks so much for listening, guys, and 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.