

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: Hey, everybody and welcome to episode 315 of the podcast. My name is Carey Nieuwhof and I hope our time together today helps you lead like never before. Today's podcast is brought to you by TheAscentLeader.org and by LifeWay Leadership. My guest is Liz Forkin Bohannon. If you don't know Liz, man, you're going to be so glad you tuned in. So whatever you find yourself doing today, it's January, you might be at the gym, maybe you're driving around, maybe you're out for a walk or I don't know, cooking dinner, whatever. Podcasting is exploding and many people point to 2020 being the year of the podcast, and it's an absolute joy to be able to bring you conversations like this one with Liz.

Carey Nieuwhof: She is a really fun, she's an exceptional leader. Forbes has ranked as a top public speaker. She was named by John Maxwell as one of the top three transformational leaders in the United States. She's been featured on Shark Tank, Good Morning America, Bloomberg Business, Vogue Magazine, and so many other places. And she's the Founder and CEO of Sseko Designs, something we will get into. But she's a bit of an unlikely leader. And I think you'll find this super encouraging. She's a young mom, too. So I really enjoyed this conversation and I hope you will as well.

Carey Nieuwhof: One of the things that's changing in the leadership landscape these days is the ability to really have the right kind of conversations that are custom to you. And that's why I'm so excited to talk to you about TheAscentLeader.org. This group through CDF Capital, friends of mine that I've known for a couple of years now, organizes cohorts. Imagine spending a day with Jud Wilhite, another day with Craig Groeschel and a third day with Judah Smith. And what if the subject was how to have a bigger impact through digital marketing? Like, basically how to get your message out there, where people spend most of their time which is on their phones. So one of the best ways to take new ground online is through a cohort.

Carey Nieuwhof: There is a face-to-face opportunity with some amazingly talented ministry pioneers through TheAscentLeader.org cohorts. And I participated in these before. We actually had a group into my house a few months ago who came to meet with me through The Ascent Leader, and that's why I'm very excited to share this with you. So if you are interested in joining a cohort this year and spending some time with Jud Wilhite, Craig Groeschel and Judah Smith, and you're ready to take some serious steps in the digital online world, TheAscentLeader.org is the way to do it. So you need to apply, obviously, but how to do it is to head on over to TheAscentLeader.org. That's A-S-C-E-N-T, TheAscentLeader.org and you can make your application now. I think that's going to be an incredible cohort they're putting together.

Carey Nieuwhof: Also, I've got a few exclusive courses that I've developed for my friends over at Ministry Grid, and they're finally available but for the month of January only. You can head on over to MinistryGrid.com/Carey. And here's the cool thing. Those courses are free for you this month. I teach on overcoming some leadership challenges. They are unique courses to LifeWay, you will not find them anywhere else and it gets better. If you complete any of the courses on Ministry Grid, their team will send you a copy of my latest book, *Didn't See It Coming*, as a gift. No strings attached. So head on over to MinistryGrid.com/Carey, check out the free courses. And while you're there, check out their full volunteer training library you can use at your church. We use it at Connexus. We love it. It's great for developing leaders and volunteers. You'll find those exclusive courses in there this month as well.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, guys, I'm so excited to bring you this conversation with Liz Forkin Bohannon. We also have a growing number of episodes on YouTube, if you're interested in that. And of course, we're on Spotify and all the major channels. So wherever you do your listening, make sure you subscribe. And that way, you'll get episodes absolutely free. And without much further ado, my conversation with Liz Forkin Bohannon. Liz, welcome to the podcast.

Liz Bohannon: I'm so excited to be here. Thanks so much for having me.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, that's great. So we'll have some listeners who know you and a few might be meeting you for the first time. Can you share a little bit about your background and what you do as an entrepreneur and founder of Sseko?

Liz Bohannon: Yeah. So my name is Liz Forkin Bohannon. I am the Co-founder and CEO of a global socially conscious fashion brand called Sseko Designs. My background is actually in journalism. I studied journalism for undergrad and grad school and became increasingly interested in issues that were facing women and girls who were living in extreme poverty, and in conflict and post-conflict zones. And so I graduated from grad school and went out looking for my dream job and wanting to be a reporter and write and report on issues facing women and girls across the globe. And that didn't happen. And I got a job at a big corporate communications firm instead.

Liz Bohannon: Just a few months into that job, I kind of have this come to Jesus moment, where I realized that I said I was really interested in and I was passionate about. I cared so much about these global social justice issues and issues specifically, that were facing women and girls living in extreme poverty, but that I didn't have a single friend who was a girl who grew up in extreme poverty. And that there was this pretty big delta between my intellectual beliefs and the actual life that I was living in the community that I was building. So I quit that corporate job and I bought a one-way plane ticket to Uganda. I didn't have a plan, I didn't go with an organization, I had my little journalism degree and thought, I'm just going to like show up.

Carey Nieuwhof: Why Uganda? I mean, you could have gone anywhere.

Liz Bohannon: I could have gone anywhere. I knew I wanted to learn about women living in extreme poverty and conflict and post-conflict zones. And I had done a little bit of studying research. I took Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution class in undergrad, and focused my research on the conflict happening in northern Uganda at the time. So there was about a 20-year basically like civil conflict situation. So I knew that there were a lot of women who were living in extreme poverty and who were living in a post-conflict zone. And so, of all of the places in the world, I knew a little bit more about Uganda than a lot of other things. And so that was enough for me to say like, okay, Uganda it is.

Liz Bohannon: Honestly, it didn't feel like that heavy or big of a decision because I really envisioned it would just be the first. Like, it'd be like, I'll travel around East Africa, maybe I'll make my way up to the Middle East, maybe go through Southeast Asia. I kind of envisioned that this was just going to be the very beginning, and so where I started just didn't really matter that much. And now 10 years later, I own a vertically integrated manufacturing company in Uganda, and it'll be a part of my story for the rest of my whole life. I didn't know that when I bought that plane ticket to Uganda.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's incredible. And that was a decade ago, was it?

Liz Bohannon: Was a decade ago, yeah. That was a decade ago.

Carey Nieuwhof: Go ahead.

Liz Bohannon: I was just going to say, so I show up in Uganda and I'm learning a ton about the issues facing women and girls living in extreme poverty. And really kind of long story short, I'll make a long story short because now I have a book, and you can read the long story if you want more of the details. That's a really nice thing about actually having the book. I showed up and I started learning about a lot of the challenges women and girls face, and a lot of it comes down to economic and educational opportunity. I met an incredible group of young women really academically-gifted female scholars in the top 5% of students in the country who were not able to go to college because, basically, during the nine-month gap between high school and university, they were testing in a college but going back home to find jobs and they couldn't find jobs.

Liz Bohannon: Because they're from areas of the country where there might be an 80% youth unemployment rate. And financial opportunity that does exist really defaults to the boys in the village. So that was one big problem. And then the other big problem was just social support and community. They had spent the last two years, essentially a boarding school, so away from their family and communities and with other 25 other really smart, really academically-gifted young women. And they've got teachers and administrators that really believe in them, and then during this gap period, they go back to their villages where they might be

the only women in their entire community who have graduated from high school, let alone have aspirations to go on to university. And they face a lot of social pressure primarily through the form of bride price. To get married, to start having kids, to not continue their education.

Liz Bohannon: So everything that I saw and learned about, this was just like all of a sudden this huge global issue of women and girls and extreme poverty and gender inequity became relatively small. It was like, okay, here's what's right in front of me, though. 25 of the smartest young women in the country, and a nine-month gap that's causing a bit of a headache. How do we close this nine-month gap? And so I tried different things. Immediate reaction was to start a charity or nonprofit, where we could get women in the US to sponsor women in Uganda. And this could be a whole podcast of its own but became, the more I dug in, the more I researched, the more I really listened to people, frankly, that were a lot smarter than me. The more I realized, like, the money is just kind of the tip of the iceberg. Like, the problem is actually a lot deeper than that.

Liz Bohannon: It's things like students graduating out of the educational system and not having an economy that can support them. Unemployment rates and lack of industry growth and all of these things lead me to go, oh my gosh, I think we need to solve this problem with business. We need to create jobs, we need to contribute to the local economy and all of kind of the things that support that. And so I started a chicken farm and that failed really dramatically. Then I started ... I had designed these little sandals, they had a leather base and these interchangeable straps so you could kind of tie in style and a bunch of different ways. I spent months traveling the country and prototyping these samples out and got the product to a good enough point.

Liz Bohannon: I went to the school and hired three young women, Mary, Mercy and Rebecca, and I taught them how to make the sandals and then I made a promise that changed the whole trajectory of my life. When I was like, "Okay, here's the deal, ladies. If you make these sandals for the next nine months, I promise that you will go to college next year." And they were like, "Great." And I was like, "Okay." And came back home to the US and started slinging sandals out of the back of my car. But it actually worked. We sold enough sandals to send Mary, Mercy and Rebecca to university. And really started dreaming about like, "Hey, I mean, if we could do this for three women, let's do it again next year and employee twice as many women."

Liz Bohannon: Really started focusing on the manufacturing side of our business and spent the next really five or six years building out a best in class vertically integrated manufacturing company in East Africa. Really from the beginning, we've had a vision of like, we don't want to be a bless your heart fair trade organization. That's a nonprofit that says they're business because they sell a kind of subpar, crappy product that people buy because they really just want to support the cause. We want to prove that really good business can be done in East Africa. And that business done with value and with hard can make a massive impact,

long-term in the global economy for like sustainable life left. And so we spent about six years building that out.

Liz Bohannon: We now own this awesome, beautiful factory. And we've got a fully Ugandan management and executive team. And then about four years ago, we were really nailing it kind of on the product side. We make really beautiful product, I think, especially in a podcast where people can't see what I'm talking about, unfortunately. We have a lot of ideas of like, what you know what I'm saying, like, "We're making this product and it's helping young women in East Africa," about what that might be. And we are really dead set on challenging all of those assumptions and saying like, actually, our product is amazing. It's super high quality. It's really well-made.

Carey Nieuwhof: We'll link to it in the show notes, Liz. So we'll make sure that people who access the show notes can get right over to see some of your product, and perhaps can they buy it right off your website, too?

Liz Bohannon: Yeah. You can buy it off the site and it's really, really high quality, beautiful, on trend. We really kind of started thinking about, we've got this mission to create community and opportunity for women in East Africa and we're doing that through our manufacturing. And then we really started thinking about how do we do that here in the US where we're based? What are the needs here? How can we create community and opportunity through the retail side of our business? The thing that we realized when we really started leaning in and listening to like, "Well, what are the problems? What are we hearing? What are the challenges?" A really interesting problem started to emerge here, at home. And that was that every time I would speak, we'd be on a podcast, the whole deal, I would have women that would reach out to me and they would say, "How did you do it? Like, how did you..."

Liz Bohannon: "How did you find your passion? It seems like you're you're living the dream and you found this passion and I really want my work to matter. I kind of went there basically saying, I want to be a social entrepreneur. I want to make money and feel great about the impact that I'm making in the world. But I don't have a background in business or I've got three kids under the age of five or I've got a full time job that I love and that pays the bills, but I'm not feeling like my heart is in it." And so we just kept hearing this over and over again. And I just kept being like, "I don't know, sorry." And then we were like, "What are we doing? If we're doing something that is resonating with people, how do we share it? Like, how do we invite people into it?"

Liz Bohannon: So we really decided about four years ago, we totally pivoted and shifted our entire business model. We took our products off of store shelves, and instead said, "Hey, we want to use our retail model to like democratize impact entrepreneurship. And for that woman who's got three kids under the age of five, who wants to be a part of something, we want to help her build a business and a life of purpose and passion and impact. And for the woman who's a full

time marketer, we want to help bring her into a community where she can actually feel like her life is making a difference." So we launched what we call Sseko Fellows. So basically, instead of selling through stores, we sell through individual impact entrepreneurs in their community.

Liz Bohannon: So they sell the product, they tell their friends about Sseko, they style their friends and then they earn an income. And these women are the backbone of our retail business now in the first full year. So we had about 30 women in this like kind of secret pilot program that we ran. Those women ended up generating more in revenue and impact for our team in East Africa than we had ever done through our wholesale store.

Carey Nieuwhof: No way. So you risked like moving from retail into, what do you call it? The wholesale...

Liz Bohannon: Yeah. It's direct sales. So we were like, "Oh my gosh, this is it. This is who we were meant to be all along," like creating community and opportunity not just for women in East Africa, but by doing that, by creating community and opportunity for women right here at home. And so now we have just this like beautiful epic global sisterhood. We just actually on October 31st, found out every year our top sellers earn an all expenses paid trip to Uganda. So we've got this crew going over, and they get to go to Uganda and they get to learn about how our products are made and meet their Ugandan colleagues and we share meals together. Just like get to see this is it. This is the full picture of our global sisterhood.

Liz Bohannon: Actually, we're a lot more similar than we think we are. We have a lot more in common, share a lot more and just how like motivating and inspiring it is when our team in Uganda feels connected to this like, "I get to show up at my job making sandals and Uganda. And I am a part of this story of a woman finding community and of building a life of purpose and impact, and contributing financially to her family back in the US." Meanwhile, our fellows here in the US get to say like, "Hey, I'm styling my friends. I also have a killer wardrobe now, and I've met all of these amazing women, and I'm making this impact for female scholars and Uganda," and really kind of bringing our impact full circle. So that's what we're up to now.

Carey Nieuwhof: How did you select those women? In Africa, you told us a little bit about it. But in America, how did you find those 30?

Liz Bohannon: It was just whoever would take us up on it. So we went through and looked at like all of our repeat customers. Like, do we have women who purchased a lot from us over the years. We had like a kind of sub-group, we called it the Brave Collective and it wasn't ... I think, in hindsight, this is a really good lesson of why you should do things like this. We have a sub-group called the Brave Collective that was there. We didn't sell them anything. It was not like promotional. It was literally just like, "Hey, we want to create a space online for women who love

our brand. But more than loving our brand, they believe similar..." The reason that they resonate with our brand is because they want to create a world that's better and brighter for women and girls.

Liz Bohannon: So we would do monthly challenges that were all about taking a brave step. You would have women that we would give ideas of like, here's something to do this month. And it had nothing to do with Sseko. It had all to do with like, you were created for a purpose, and the more you are living out of courage and not out of fear, the more you're going to become who you were created to be. And then you're going to make this impact in your community. So we would like put out challenges and then women would get on and they would share about it. And they would say, like, "I tried this and it totally failed." And people would be like, "Me too." And there would be this sense of like support and camaraderie. Or like, "I did this and it succeeded beyond my wildest dreams," and women would support them.

Liz Bohannon: So we just have this really beautiful group that was already existing that we didn't really have plans for other than, we want to create community. So it was kind of we went to that group, and we're like, "Okay, we've been doing this for a few years now. And we've never like sold you anything, we've never asked anything of you. But now we have this thing and we kind of explained it." We're like, "If you love Sseko, and you want to take your love for it to the next level, and also like, hey, there's this income earning opportunity." Because one of the things that we realized is, you can only ask so much volunteers, right? Like people get really stoked and they will contribute. And they will volunteer a lot in the beginning, and then eventually it's like real life sets in and you've got jobs, then you got kids, and you've got your community. And we only have so many hours in a week.

Liz Bohannon: So one of the things that we realized is like, if we want women to really make this a part of their life, they need to be compensated for it. We want it to be able to take up a larger chunk of their life. But in order to do that, money matters. And it's like it doesn't need to be the most important thing in your life. But it is an important thing, because its resources and... So really saying like, "Hey, you're already talking about Sseko, you're already telling your friends about it, you're already sharing links to our products, what if you could actually earn an income doing that?" And the hypothesis was that, that would enable women to be more engaged for a longer term, and that hypothesis was definitely proven out. That it's like, now all of a sudden, "Well, I can pay for childcare."

Liz Bohannon: "I can spend five hours a week on this because I can pay for somebody else to come watch my kid while I host a show or while I work on my online business because I'm actually earning an income doing it. I can go to that national conference that you guys have. I can invest in myself in my business because I'm actually making money." So it was like really the Brave Collective, so that kind of like evangelical, kind of like core customer group, repeat customers, basically

anybody that would like ... We were like, we don't know what we're doing. It was such a joke in the beginning, truly. It was like we were literally sending boxes of product and like printed out inventory sheets, and they were sending us back envelopes of cash and checks.

Liz Bohannon: It was very, very gritty, very minimal viable product, if you will, of just like, all of the structure can come later. What we need to see right now is like, can it work? Can we figure out a way to harness this kind of passion and desire to make an impact in women's lives and then prove it out. And then once we proved it out, then we were like, "Okay, now we're going to shift our resources and build out the platform and the team to actually support this and have it be like a legitimate thing."

Carey Nieuwhof: Because I read your book, and it's an extremely well-written book, but one of the things that amazed me, like even listening to the first 15 minutes of this interview, you would think, "Liz has got it all together. She's got it all going on." But you're pretty honest about some of the missteps. I mean, I think the book opens and you're in the woods, in the shower and the shower stops and you're going to a really important meeting. And then there was a time in your company where you ran out of money and you kind of own your junk pretty ... Like it's not just the steady climb up and everything's perfect, and everything's so Wall Street or Madison Avenue, like that is not the story. So I guess my question is, it's an interesting combination. Can you tell us more about that combination of, I can't even find my keys, and here I am running this really successful company? Because that's a fun combo Liz.

Liz Bohannon: I don't think I'm very unique. I think I'm just unique in my honesty about it. And the reason I'm honest is because throughout the last 10 years, it has been so harmful to me to hear these stories of the unicorn, of the silver bullet, of the like, "I just like casually tried this thing and everybody loved it. And then my biggest problem that I ever had in my business was my demand outpaced my ability to like provide..." Because what that does to people is it creates the sense of like, when they mess up, when they struggle, when something flops, their narrative is like, "It's because I suck. It's because I'm an idiot or it's because like, nobody wants this, nobody's interested in this. Like, I'm doing something wrong."

Liz Bohannon: The more and more we can talk about like, "Hey actually, you messing up, you making a mistake, something flopping, it's not a sign necessarily that you're going in the wrong direction. It's actually a sign that you're trying to do something difficult." And that if you're not screwing up on the regular, like if you're not trying and failing, if you're not setting goals and like falling short, you're actually probably playing it safe. And long term, that's a bummer. That's going to be what over the course of your lifetime you look back on and say like, "Man, I didn't give it a shot. I didn't try. I was ruled by my fear."

Liz Bohannon: So one of my core purposes in my life is like, yes, I want to run a successful business. And I want to create a massive impact for women and girls across the globe. I want to do that in a way that only encourages and inspires other people to either be a part of what I'm doing or to go run their race. To have like the freedom to go out, to try hard things, to fail and to have a whole community of people that are saying like, "Hey, your failures, your embarrassments, your missteps, your mistakes, they're not a sign that you're doing the wrong thing, they're actually a sign that you're probably on to something really great. And you're doing something really rare and really brave. So like, don't give up and don't stop."

Liz Bohannon: We only do that, as leaders, when we go first. When we say, "Hey, I'm not going to stand in front of a group of people and ask you to share your mistakes and me stand here and say like, 'Look at me, I've got it all figured out. And I'm so smart. And I stumbled upon these awesome things that work.'" And instead saying like one of my mottos as leader is like, go first. Go first in the hard things and show people the way in that. And it creates a remarkable sense of freedom and inspiration and encouragement for people.

Carey Nieuwhof: Have you always been that way? Is that your default personality or is that a learned behavior?

Liz Bohannon: It's really learned, actually. I don't know if you're an Enneagramer at all.

Carey Nieuwhof: I am. I'm an eight.

Liz Bohannon: You are? I'm an eight. So there we go. So you know this, that vulnerability is very difficult. Of all of the numbers on the Enneagram, vulnerability for an eight is the most difficult. We are, and I would say this is very true to me, I have an easy time being honest, I have a difficult time being vulnerable. Because my MO is kind of like, "I want to protect myself. I don't want anybody to have power over me. I need to protect myself and my people," and there's like kind of this strong protective instinct around how I exist in the world. And so it actually has been a very painful learned process. To say like life is better when we do it together. And when you put down your defenses, and when you let people in before it's all like tidied up and and polished off with a bow.

Liz Bohannon: So yeah, I don't think it's actually been something natural. But I generally believe that when we lean into the things that aren't necessarily natural for us, that is really transformational. But there's like one thing to be like, "Well, this is just who I am and how I exist in the world." And for me, it's absolutely been a process of taking the risk, of being really scared, of letting somebody into something, and then to watch how that creates community and transformation and trust, and that has completely transformed my entire life.

Carey Nieuwhof: How did you do that? And what were like, that's fascinating. Because, I mean, your book is remarkably raw, like very honest. Not in terms of this big expose

about here's a secret I'm sharing with the world. But just like, yeah, sometimes I spaz out a little bit. Sometimes we almost went bankrupt. Here I am in the woods in a cinderblock building with shampoo in my hair and I've got ... Oh, my gosh, that key meeting you had with an investor where you got Alibaba wrong. Oh, my gosh. That was great. I mean, those are pretty, pretty fun moments that would be easier not to mention.

Liz Bohannon: Absolutely. I think I really started practicing this probably honestly in college. I lived in a house with women, there was like six of us. And I have some really awesome models of people, older, like adults who were living in really intentional community and just doing awesome stuff with their lives. That wasn't like, I got married, and I bought a house, and I bought a bigger house. And then I took the job that would let me buy more stuff and buy a bigger house that was further away from people. Just loving one another really well. And because they were so loved by one another, it enabled them to love their communities in really powerful ways.

Liz Bohannon: I really started leaning into like, how are they building these really beautiful lives? And one of the key things that existed in every single one of these communities was they have a core group of people with whom they're 100% honest, open, transparent and vulnerable with. That they share their stuff, that they give authority to their friends to be able to call them on their stuff and ask difficult questions that normally were like, "That's rude. You shouldn't ask me that. Like, that's pushing. That's being too nosy." And really saying like, "No, like you have authority to be a part of this and I'm committing to kind of being completely open and honest and transparent."

Liz Bohannon: Starting in college, my sophomore year of college, I lived with a group of gals. It was so awkward and so forced in the beginning. I was like, we're going to do these house meetings every Monday night at 10:00 p.m., because we're college students. It was like the whole purpose of this meeting is that we're going to talk about our lives, we're going to talk about hard things. And we're going to talk about if something happened in the house and you were frustrated or your feelings were hurt or you're feeling annoyed by somebody, this is the time and place where you're going to say it out loud. And then you're going to talk about it in front of all of us. And then we're going to ask one another for forgiveness and we're going to pursue like reconciliation. It just started like six women in a college house.

Liz Bohannon: But through that what I realized is through many, many months of it being just like super weird and awkward and feeling like really forced, slowly what started happening is we kept holding the space. And then it just kept getting realer and realer. The more real it got, and the more real we spoke out, "Here's the thing I'm really struggling with, here's this thing that I did or didn't do that I have a ton of shame around. Or here's this fear. And it's like keeping me up at night," and it just creates the sense of then everybody around the room starts going like,

"Yeah, me too. Like, I've totally been there. Or I'm feeling this thing in my own life." And it just made life so much better.

Liz Bohannon: Like when we take things out of secrecy, and bring them into the light in community and through vulnerability and through transparency. These are friend groups. I'm 10 years out of college now and I communicate with these women 15 times a day and we meet once a year in-person. I mean, these are still absolutely a core community. They are one of the kind of core communities that are the reason that I can go take massive risks in my life. I can put myself in positions where I make mistakes and I experienced like a ton of shame and failure. Because I know that I have this group of people that I don't need to hide that. I can come back and I can share that with, and that enables me to take these bigger risks and leaps.

Liz Bohannon: You only have to do that so many times. You're like, I did this really hard thing that was like really unorganic and awkward in the beginning. But then look at the fruit of that a year later, 5 years later, 10 years later that it's totally transformed like how I live in community now here in Portland, how we run our business. Like, what we're trying to do through the Sseko Fellows is say, I'm saying I want to create the community for you, Sseko Fellow, that I wish I would have had 10 years ago when I started out as an entrepreneur. Because it is for real. Like, if you are trying to do something difficult in the world, you are going to face criticism, self-criticism and external criticism. You are going to experience deep shame, failure risk that you could avoid if you took the safer path.

Liz Bohannon: Come join a group of people that when you fail will say, "Yeah, me too. I totally have been there." Because honestly, your ability to show up and to laugh, you can't laugh at yourself if you think I made this mistake and it's because I'm an utter failure, and I'm totally worthless. That's not funny. When you're surrounded by a group of people that are like, "Oh, my gosh, you think that that's bad? You should hear about the first time I tried that." Then all of a sudden it becomes like, "We're all just like humans trying the best we can to do something cool." And that makes all the difference. And so speaking of writing the book, it didn't even feel like that intentional, honestly, to be that open and honest. It was just like this is how I have come to believe is the best way to do life is to like, I don't need to be the hero.

Liz Bohannon: I have enough people, not very many, frankly. But like, enough people that I know love me, despite what I can accomplish and who I am and how successful I am, that it gives me the freedom to say, "It's so much more interesting to me that you would meet me or read my book or become a part of what we're doing. And that you would go, 'Oh, my gosh, if she can do it, I can do it.'" Then you go out and do something that I never would have dreamed of. I never would have thought of that thing. You can make an impact in the world that is so far beyond or just in a different way than anything that I ever would have

done, that is infinitely more interesting than like one more person that thinks I'm cool.

Liz Bohannon: That I have my stuff together. And then I'm just like, inherently brilliant, and that's why I've been able to go out and build a multimillion dollar business that's creating impact for women and girls across across the globe. So that's just it. In writing this story, that posture just felt like a no-brainer. That's what we're going to do.

Carey Nieuwhof: You can answer this in the current tense or past tense, but when you've had a fail, where you're like, "Oh my gosh," not to pick on the same examples but, "I'm broke or I just embarrass myself or just about ran the company," what is your self talk as a leader, as a person that helps you not ... Because I know there's so many leaders who get stuck exactly in that ditch and they never get out. And they go to exactly what you just said, "I'm a failure." It's not like, "No, this was a failure." It's like, "I'm a failure. I'll never amount to anything." How do you talk yourself out of that or how did you?

Liz Bohannon: Yeah. I kind of touched on this a little bit in the book. There's a chapter called Be on Assignment in Your Own Life. It talks about how I moved to Uganda originally as a journalist. I'd gone to journalism school. All you do in journalism school is learn how to ask interesting questions, follow leads, and then communicate that in a way that feels like the most honest, true version of the story. So I find that to be pretending to be a journalist is incredibly helpful if you're building a business, and I kind of focus a little bit more on that in the book. It is also incredibly helpful psychologically, like with your self-talk. So I noticed. I also have a chapter in the book called Choosing Curiosity Over Criticism.

Liz Bohannon: So for me, I just allow ... I don't get down on myself when I criticize myself because I know I'll never be someone ... Maybe I will. Maybe I'm not self-actualized enough and there are people that are out there. I've kind of succumbed to the fact that it's like when I make a mistake, when I embarrass myself, when I see the numbers pull through and they're not what I thought they would be, I have this great idea and I sell a bunch of people on it, and then it ends up flopping. I pretty much feel like I'm always going to criticize myself. Like, my gut instinct, unless I have some Nirvana moment or transformation, will probably be, "You suck. You suck. You're such a failure. You're such a fake. That was a huge..."

Liz Bohannon: Part of the reason why I titled The book Beginner's Pluck is because one of my kind of key and core insecurities, especially when you're making this big shift from wholesale to direct sales was like, "Okay, if we do the shift and we fail, everybody around me is going to look at me and go see, it was just beginner's luck." They're going to look at the way that you succeeded and say, "See, she tried again, and she failed so miserably. Nothing that she's done in her life and her career is valid, and it just proves that she's a fake and she's a fraud. And now she's finally getting found out for being the fake and fraud idiot that she is." So,

that is my shame story. Is that I'm a fake, I'm a fraud. I can convince people, but really when it comes down to it, I can't execute. I can't pull it off. I'm not successful. I'm a failure.

Liz Bohannon: It doesn't matter how bigger or how small, immediately my brain goes to that. I have given up trying to keep myself from immediately going there. And instead of I'm like, all right, immediately your gut reaction is going to be that you suck. Can that message of you suck actually trigger something else though? And can that trigger, for me, the most powerful thing is can that trigger your curiosity? When you start to say you suck, you're failure, can you lean in and can you pretend to be a journalist? If I kind of separating myself and giving myself this like journalist alter ego, it helps me to go like, "Okay. What was I missing there? There was a piece of the puzzle that I didn't see."

Liz Bohannon: There's something about this message, this product, this campaign, that didn't resonate with the end consumer in the way that I thought it would. Instead of like, I suck ... It's such a waste of time. What really is helpful is, what was the key piece of information that I didn't have? I'm going to go out, I'm going to ask some people. How could I have done better? I'm going to listen. I'm going to like, lean in. When someone reacts to me in a way that is not favorable. Instead of going like, "Well, they're a jerk or like, why I suck?" Going like, "I wonder what's happening? They clearly have a motivation, something that they're trying to achieve and accomplish and mine didn't align with them."

Liz Bohannon: I want to get really curious and figure out like, "What did they think success would look like? And how could we partner in that?" It just completely changes your entire framework when you pretend to be this investigative journalist, and like your job is just to get to the bottom of stuff and like, figure out what's going on. And then to tweak it and to iterate and to evolve. And then to take it back out and say, "Okay, round two, 2.0. Let's see how this goes," and put it out there and then get really curious and look at your results and pivot. It creates a barrier between what we create in the world and then our beliefs about how we were created.

Liz Bohannon: That barrier I think is incredibly helpful and it helps us separate ourselves from I am worthy. I am worthy and I have value and I have something to offer. I am beloved. I am made in the image of the divine. And that has nothing to do with what I create, how successful it is, how big it is, how fast it is, what my bottom line is. That separation allows me to get really curious and to kind of lean in.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's fascinating. It's really, really helpful. And it resonates to some extent like with my own journey, I'm a few decades ahead of you into leadership. But that's one of the big differences between me today and me 20 years ago is, I've got something I'm launching right now, that isn't quite going. And instead of like, "You suck, you're terrible." That's a fleeting thought. And then I'm like, "I wonder what we did here that isn't quite working?" You separate yourself from the problem.

Liz Bohannon: One of the most convicting things for me, when this really took root for me, is when I realized if I don't believe that about myself, if I don't believe that I'm inherently valuable, and worthy, despite my accomplishments, then I actually don't believe that about other people. I'm going to walk around in the world treating others as if like, you are as valuable as the thing that you produce in the world. And that gutted me. To think that I would look at other people and say, "You special, valuable, worthy. You, not so much." I have this deep conviction, that I can look at this person who's society and a largely like a large part of our population that we work with, they are the rung of humanity.

Liz Bohannon: The global economics has said like, "You don't matter. You are not valuable. You don't matter. You're just taking up space, you're just a burden." And the deepest belief of my heart is like, "Wrong. That person matters and they deserve dignity and respect. And it doesn't matter if they can't read. And it doesn't matter if they've never held a job in the formal economy before. And it doesn't matter if since that girl was eight years old and sold into human trafficking that literally, she's been told her entire life that all she is worth is what a man will pay her for her body, which about 15 cents in rural Uganda." My whole life is dedicated to telling her that she matters.

Liz Bohannon: Then over here, I'm telling myself like, "You don't unless you're successful. You don't unless that thing that you try works the first time." And the delta, the cognitive dissonance between what I say I believe about somebody else, and what I actually believe about myself, totally gutted me. I was like, "I can't authentically believe that about her unless I also believe it about myself." And that changed everything.

Carey Nieuwhof: Liz, that's profound. That is deeply, deeply profound. Thank you for for sharing that. That's so helpful. I feel like "Okay, end of interview," but I have like 700 questions left. So that was great. Thank you. That's a gift.

Liz Bohannon: Thank you for asking the question.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah. Well, it's a great answer. And it's a different take on things, a very different take and theologically extremely sound. So I got to ask you, just shifting gears a little bit. Beginner's Pluck, you defined it on the cover of the book. But it's like 100-year-old term that ... I remember it being used years ago now that you mentioned it, but it's cool. It's not a term you made up. So what is pluck?

Liz Bohannon: So pluck, the noun, means spirited and determined courage. And I just love it-

Carey Nieuwhof: People used to say they're plucky, right?

Liz Bohannon: Yep. It peaked in popularity in the early 1900s. I actually found it-

Carey Nieuwhof: I'm not that old.

Liz Bohannon: Don't you know? I have a three and a half year old son, and when he was about a year old, I was reading him the old Winnie the Pooh, the full story. And there's a moment where, Pooh, I think it's Pooh says to Piglet, "Piglet, you've got to gather up your pluck." And I just said that out loud to my son. I read him voices. And so when I said out loud to my son, I was like, "Pluck, you've got to gather up your pluck." I was like, I'm going to start using the word pluck. And it just became a word that I started integrating into my language because it kind of sounds like what it means. Like plucky, it sounds like spirited and determined courage. And I was like, "I want to be a plucky person. I want to have pluck. I want to be plucky." So when I was thinking about this book and kind of the spirit that I wanted this story and people that read it to kind of emulate this idea of having spirited and determined courage was very appealing to me.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's cool. Okay. Well, with that defined, I love the fact that you kind of take on the advice that's almost on every Instagram feed in the world right now. Follow your dreams. Find your passion. What's wrong with that thinking?

Liz Bohannon: What's wrong with this thinking is that it doesn't do what we're hoping it's going to do. Like we say it's going to inspire people, it's going to motivate people. But what it shows anecdotally and then actually just like the social science that's coming out, is saying it's overwhelming people. And it's keeping people stuck in a state of waiting, instead of doing what they were made to do, which is creating. Which is putting themselves out there, which is trying, which is failing, which is iterating, which is getting curious. It's creating this illogical narrative and state of being where we think we have to be a certain way, and it needs to be successful out of the gate.

Liz Bohannon: It's creating this narrative that our passion is this like singular thing that we can discover if we get lucky. That the Almighty is going to give us this moment, this word, this vision, and if you haven't gotten that yet, well, then you just need to keep waiting because you haven't found it yet. You haven't discovered it yet. You haven't had your like aha moment. And that actually puts us into a very passive posture in life. One of the reasons that I titled the book, Beginner's Pluck, is because one of the things that started happening in our community. So now we've got women all across the country, they're selling the product, they're earning an income. We've got women that are just like killing it. They're selling so much every month. They're building these teams. They're running these organizations. They're quitting their full time jobs. They're just like slaying the game.

Liz Bohannon: I would invite these women to come speak on like a monthly webinar with the rest of our community. Like, "Hey, Cheryl, what did you do that's working?" It was so common for a woman to get on to this webinar, and she would go, "First of all, I think I just got lucky." I would get so mad because I'm like, "Sister, no. I see what you're doing behind the scenes. And I see the leadership principles that you are inacting of grit and of curiosity and evolving and iterating and putting out in minimally viable product and then tweaking it and being good

with good enough. All of these things, I see you living that out. That none of that has anything to do with luck. It's actually pluck."

Liz Bohannon: But the thing that would make me so mad about it and why I just banned the word luck on our monthly calls, is because when one person hears somebody else say, "Well, I think I just got lucky," that puts them into the state of passivity. Where it's like, "I guess I just have to wait until I get lucky." When someone's like, "I found my passion. I have my aha moment. I never could have seen it coming. It just hit me like a million bricks." When somebody hears that story, that puts them into a state of passivity. Where it's like, "They didn't do anything. They can't like say what happened, it just like hit him and it just came out of the sky. So I guess I'll just like keep sitting and waiting and like thinking and dreaming without actually doing anything about it until I have my aha moment."

Liz Bohannon: So the go find your kind of passion narrative really contributes a lot to that kind of state of like, "I just got a strike gold and get lucky." When we talk about building our passion, and when we talk about being surprised by it. And when we talk about like, iterating and evolving and trying and failing and missing the mark, that puts people into such a much more active state. Where it's like, no one thinks like ... No one talks about building a house. "I just like woke up one day and had this vision and I built it." It's like, no, no, no. When you use the word language building, here's what you think about immediately, you think about getting a vision, then you think about making blueprints, then you think about doing a costing analysis.

Liz Bohannon: And then you think about going out and buying the materials, and then you think about freaking laying the bricks. And we think about laying bricks you got to lay a foundation, and then you get to do the next level. And then you get to do ... There's like no illusion that it just kind of appears. So it just creates a mentality that is infinitely more helpful and kind of propelling us forward.

Carey Nieuwhof: It's interesting, I deal with a lot of young leaders, and particularly people in that early to mid 20s. And it's been standard for years to ask people, "Hey, what do you want to do? Like, what's your major?" The only answer I seem to get these days is, "I don't really know. There's so many choices." Do you think that has to do to some extent with follow your dreams and find your passion? Like there's just so many options out there and it's so ethereal? I'm curious if you see paralyzed by that?

Liz Bohannon: Yes. I think there's the paradox of choice for sure plays into that. I think the other thing that plays into that, and I touched on this in the book, I opened the book with kind of the narrative, "You are so special." You think it's really inspiring young people, right? Like, "You're so special, you're above average, you just need to tap in and find your own extraordinary so you can go out and you can be anything that you want to be." I think that that leads to what you're talking about. This kind of paralyzed, overwhelming sense of like, "I have to go

out and I've got to do this really special thing. And it's got to be something that nobody's ever done before."

Liz Bohannon: It's like, actually the vast majority of people that I know doing really cool stuff in the world, nothing is new under the sun. They saw a problem in a slightly different way, and came up with a solution that was a little bit better than somebody else's solution. And then they kind of interlaid their own personal story and perspective and personality, and really created something that seems really unique and new. But it's like, at the end of the day, you would not believe the amount of people that have reached out to me since I've written this book and said something to the effect of like, "I had this idea. I have this concept."

Liz Bohannon: I was just on somebody's radio show and she was like she just turned in her book manuscript. She was like, "I want to let you know a lot of the concepts that you talk about in your book, like I talk about in my book, I'm not like copying you or ripping you off." I'm like, "Nothing is new under the sun." At the end of the day, I'm not some rocket scientist. But you're going to say that thing in a way, that's your personality, it's your tone of voice, it interlays your personal stories, and it might be the same truth. And in fact, that's encouraging to me because we're both seeing similar truths and like trying to share those, that's only affirmation to me. That it's like, "Yeah, I think I'm onto something." But you're going to do that. You're going to touch somebody in some bizarre way that I never could have seen that I won't. So great.

Liz Bohannon: We need everybody to come to the table, creating solutions, allowing their own personalities, their own perspectives, their own personal stories to make it a little bit different. But it's kind of this idea that's like, "Well, for it to be valuable, it's got to be revolutionary. And it's got to be something nobody's ever thought about before. I'm super special, and I can do anything that I dream about. So I got to go and I got out of the gate, it's got to make a bang." And it's just like, "Or maybe you don't. Maybe you're just like kind of average."

Liz Bohannon: But if you're the one that stays curious, if you're the one that keeps getting up after everybody else is, "This failure was too much, that was too embarrassing, the risk is too high." You actually will be the one that goes on and builds something really extraordinary. But it's not because you're innately extraordinary. It's just because you might be a little more grittier and more curious and have a little bit more evolved of an ego, frankly, that doesn't need to prove to the world how special and unique you are.

Carey Nieuwhof: See, that's fascinating. I love the chapter, the point that you make about owning your average. That's what you call it. Right? I remember a poll a few years ago, I read that said 77% of people believe that they're above average, which I think is awesome.

Liz Bohannon: I love it. Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof: Really resonated with me. What do you mean by own your average?

Liz Bohannon: What I mean that on your average is the belief that you do not need to be extraordinary to build an extraordinary life. Why that is so important is because we know this current narrative of, "You're so special, you're smarter than you think you are, you're more talented, you're above average, so go do something about average." It basically results in two things, either one, you don't deep in your soul believe you're actually above average. You're like, everything is showing me that I'm that I'm pretty average. All of the indicators and external kind of feedback are showing me like I'm pretty average. And what that does is it's super demoralizing because the subtext of that narrative is you have to be extraordinary to do something extraordinary.

Liz Bohannon: So people that can't ever get to a place where they believe I am inherently extraordinary, then kind of waved the white flag and say like, "Well, I'm average or below average, so I'm going to live an average or below average life." So when people don't believe the narrative, it kind of is a bummer. And it leads them to giving up. Here's the kicker, though, when people do believe it, when they do believe to your points that 77% of people believe that they're above average, they are special, that they aren't particularly smart talented, it does the opposite of what we think it does. We think that that's going to motivate people. What that ends up doing is it puts you into a state where you are more concerned with protecting your image of being seen as special, as smart, as super talented.

Liz Bohannon: When you do that, you stop taking risks. You start saying yes to stuff you think I will go to prove your point. Like, "I'm smart. I try something and it succeeds." So we see this really clearly. I referenced the study in the book. It's done with grade school aged kids. Where what they do is they give two groups of children the same test and they get their results back. They tell one group of students, "You did really well. You are very special. You're really smart. You're really talented." They take the other group of students and they say, "Hey, you did great. You're probably really curious and like gritty and I bet you got frustrated on that question and you didn't give up. Maybe when somebody else would have done. Well done. Good job working hard on that."

Liz Bohannon: What ended up happening is they gave another test to the students. And this time they got to pick their test. And they knew what was kind of they got there as a challenging option and a less challenging option. And they gave it to those students. Students in the first group that were praised for being inherently smart, talented and special chose the less challenging assignment. Students in the other group that were praised for their capacity and work ethic chose the more challenging assignment. Because the students in the first group had been told they were special and that they were smart, and now they didn't want to risk showing that that that person was wrong. They wanted to say like, "Well, she thinks I'm smart. So I'm going to do the easier thing so I can keep showing that I'm really smart."

Liz Bohannon: Where's the students who were praised for their work ethic were like, "I'll take on the bigger assignment. This will just be another opportunity for me to show that I can like work hard and solve problems." And then here's the craziest part. The results of that second test, the students in group two that were praised for their work ethic actually performed their actual success rate on that more challenging assignment was higher than the students that chose the easier assignment were now more concerned with showing like I'm smart. Which is completely ... I've got two sons. I have a three and a half year old and a one year old, and it's totally changed my parenting philosophy.

Liz Bohannon: But of course, my gut instinct as a mom is to see all the ways in which my son is so special and intelligent and above average, and we do not say that in our home. When he does something that we're proud of, we're like, "Buddy, that was so awesome. I saw how frustrated you got about halfway through there and you kept going. I saw how you got really curious and you followed that rabbit trail. Like, look at this cool thing that you discovered and created because you followed that lead." Really like trying to create a culture where he doesn't like, I don't need him to believe that he's above average, that he's God's gift to humanity, that he's like super special.

Liz Bohannon: I want him to be praised and to be seen for being curious, for being hard working, for not giving up even when he's really frustrated. Because what we know is that ultimately, it's that kind of freedom and excitement that gets people to actually go out in the world and create. So, to me, it's like, hello? We've an entire industry of motivation and inspiration and all these inspirational gurus on Instagram, that are actually telling us something that isn't motivating us. It's keeping us feeling like stuck and scared. So a huge hope with this book is that I'm like, and I'm a very big advocate of like, I'm not just going to go out and critique something. If I'm going to critique it, I need to show up with a better offering.

Liz Bohannon: So this is kind of my offering of like, "Hey, I'm critiquing current culture and what you're hearing and telling you that it's actually not helping you, it's probably hurting you. But then I want to place that narrative with something that I think is infinitely one, just more true, more life giving and is going to be the thing that helps propel you out of waiting and into creating."

Carey Nieuwhof: I love that. I don't know how old that study is or whether it was around ... My kids are in their 20s now, but I remember similar findings when our kids were younger, and I inherently wanted to praise the report card. We shifted gears when they were young and started praising the effort. Like a B or a C, where you did your best was worth more than an A that you cruise to. And my kids did well in school, but like we tried really, really hard to praise the effort, not the result. And even honestly, as an employer, as a boss, that's not a bad strategy. We've got to hold accountable to the outcomes, but you really want to reward effort. Because at the end of the day, it's just not always going to work out the way you want. In a similar way you argue that dreaming small is better than dreaming

big. Like I love how you just tackle the motivational culture that we live in, this motivational moment. What do you mean by dreaming small?

Liz Bohannon: What I mean about dreaming small, and I will caveat this by saying like, if you've known me for 10 seconds, I'm a big dreamer and love-

Carey Nieuwhof: You kind of correct that toward the end of the book too. Where you're like, you talked about big vision, but you don't start there.

Liz Bohannon: Yeah. And the point is, start is the operative word. So often we tell people that they need to start the big dream, and that just completely paralyzes and overwhelms people. And even the word dream kind of insinuates that we're like sitting in a white room with like maybe some music on, getting a vision or like a dream. Even how we get that dream in the first place is it's kind of that going back to that like it comes to you from somewhere above, and it's mysterious and and you just stumble upon it. What I love about the idea of dreaming small, is if you can take a big dream and just make it as small as it possibly goes. And in my own story, it's like I have this huge dream and ... But it was too big. The problem was too big.

Liz Bohannon: The enormity of issues facing women and girls and global extreme poverty and gender and equality. I was like, "We could do this thing and it's going to going to ... It was like a million dollar budget and we're bringing going to millions of women and girls out of extreme poverty." But it didn't actually lead me to do me anything because it was so overwhelming. It wasn't until I broke it up and I made that dream as small as it could possibly go. And for me that came in the form of giving up the big dream and saying, "Go make a single friend. Go know one girl who grew up in extreme poverty and like have a relationship." Which is pretty low. Like, no one is getting on Oprah for making one friend.

Liz Bohannon: But that propelled me for the first time to just take control of my own life, have some integrity and build a life that was consistent with what I said I cared about. And through that tiny dream of making one friend, well then, that tiny dream became making one friend. And then that led me to learning about one problem. And then like, "Okay, this one problem needs a solution. And then I'll try to create this. And then maybe we can just help three women, just three. We'll just start with three women." And then three women became six women and six women became 18 women. And now we've to we've enabled hundreds of female scholars, we've created jobs for thousands of artisans across the globe. But none of that happened until I just did something.

Liz Bohannon: For me, I didn't do something until I gave myself permission to dream small and to just try one small thing, and then that created kind of the momentum. And the momentum combined with a sustained sense of like curiosity, following rabbit trails, letting it get a little bit bigger and bigger was so much more helpful. So the dream small message isn't for one person. Like, I'm not talking to Elon

Musk. I'm not telling him he needs to dream small. You're fine. You're doing fine, you're dreaming day. You're chugging along.

Liz Bohannon: It's for the person that feels stuck, and that feels scared, and that feels overwhelmed. And feels like everybody hears I'm stuck and they're going, "Just dream bigger, just dream big, and you'll get unstuck," and they're going, "This isn't working for me." Trying to reframe that and saying like, "Okay, just make it smaller." Make it smaller and smaller and smaller and smaller and smaller until you don't have any excuses to not just go try something. Try it with a sense of curiosity and be willing to kind of pivot and follow rabbit trails along the way.

Carey Nieuwhof: All right. In the time we got left, I want to ask you a couple more questions. One is, partway through your story, through the story of the company of Sseko Designs, you ran into a shortage of time and money. You literally ran out of money and you also felt like you ran out of time. That's something I've always said to my teams like, usually have time or money. Sometimes it's like, I don't have any money, but I got time or I don't have any time but at least I got money. I remember there was a season in my leadership years ago where we ran out of both, and I mean, it was a miracle that we survived. What happened in that case for you?

Liz Bohannon: So this was the moment in the story where I learned the importance of what's referred to, and having kind of more the tech world, but the minimal viable product. The minimally viable product. Where it's like so often we believe, "I can make this idea better if I just put more money into it. I'll make it better if I just put more time into it." And we kind of get into this like trap of the perfectionist, that in a culture where we're like, "It needs to be excellent. It needs to be perfect." There is absolutely a time and a place for excellence and for it for achieving that. Especially in the beginning, it's not going to be perfect.

Liz Bohannon: Because here's the thing, you're creating it in a total vacuum. You're not talking to your customers because you don't have customers yet. You don't know if the product is going to sell at the price point that you're putting at because you haven't tried to do it yet. So everything is still behind the curtain. And there's this myth that it's like, "I need to go raise \$4 million to perfect the prototype, to pay some consultancy firm to do a \$20,000 consumer perceptions like survey, blah, blah, blah." And it's just like, "Nope, you just need to go try to sell it and see what people the buying it, what are they saying about it? What's the feedback?"

Liz Bohannon: I literally, when I came home from Uganda, I had no money. So it wasn't even an option for me, which I'm grateful for. I truly believe that if someone would have said, "Hey, here's \$100,000 in seed money," in those early days, I would have wasted it. I would have spent it in stupid ways, because we think like, "I need to spend all this time and money in research and making sure the idea of the product and there's product/market fit and all this stuff." You know what I did? Because I was dirt poor, I took my products and I took a clipboard and I walked

down to a busy shopping center, like area outdoor shopping center, and I just stopped complete strangers and asked them, "Can I have three minutes of your time." I showed them the product and I would give them a pitch. I would ask them how much they would pay for it.

Liz Bohannon: I would kind of give a specific pitch, and then ask how much they would pay for it, and then I would get 15 people, and I would see what they said about it. And then I would change the pitch. And then I would ask them what they would pay for it. And I would see, is there any difference in consumer perception or what somebody would be willing to pay? Literally, that costs zero dollars. But you know what it does take? Is like a whole lot of gumption and like willingness to be rejected a lot by complete strangers who don't want to be approached when they're shopping with a clipboard. But it's like, "I'm so grateful because I got the information that I needed." And instead of paying \$20,000, for some fancy thing, that's not what I needed in the moment.

Liz Bohannon: What I needed was just a little bit of information so I could set a pricing strategy, so that I could go do the thing, and then I could actually get real feedback from my customers about, "Is this working? Is this not working?" So oftentimes, I really do believe that a constraint and resources, whether it's time or money, is actually a good thing because it pushes us out of the kind of planning, dreaming, researching phase into the like doing and executing. And then we can use our doing in our executing, actually, like, "We're still doing research when we're executing. We're like researching how do people respond to that? Did it work? Did it not work?" Combining those things, as opposed to being like, "I'm going to spend all this time and money prepping, researching, putting together this really slick presentation, and then I'm going to go do the thing and just hope that it works," and instead of saying, "It's all research. It's all experimentation," is actually incredibly valuable.

Carey Nieuwhof: You had the wonderful opportunity to spend a week with Seth Godin, who endorsed your brand.

Liz Bohannon: Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof: You tell me, did you do his, what is it, altMBA or how did that happen?

Liz Bohannon: Yeah. I don't know if it was officially called that back then. But it was essentially that. Yeah. I literally applied. I remember we were in San Francisco on this road trip. I'm literally living out of my car. We have no revenue and we are not cash flow positive. I mean, it's a joke. We are broke as a joke. We're literally living out of our cars, sleeping in McDonald's parking lots and my husband saw him post about it or something that he was going to select 12 entrepreneurs to come spend a week with him. And he was like, "I think you should do this." And I was like, "We are literally a joke right now." I remember in his application had asked for a mailing address, and I said, "Don't have one. I live in car, my Honda Element."

Carey Nieuwhof: You actually put that down on-

Liz Bohannon: I think I was basically like, "Here's my license plate, and that's where I live." And then you probably gathered, I got selected to go to this program. 12 amazing entrepreneurs doing all sorts of things in all different industries, very different stages of your business, their businesses. I believe that probably part of why I got chosen was because I was the whole adage of just like, fake it till you make it of just like, pretend you're bigger and you're further along and you're like, fancier than you are. I was just kind of like I'm such a joke right now that like I don't need to pretend. I'm just going to be who I am. If at the very least someone laughs when they read this application, like whatever, I'll count that as a win. Because the stakes felt so low because it felt like so impossible. Like, obviously, I'm not going to get selected for this.

Liz Bohannon: Then I ended up doing it and it was amazing. But I really do think that it's like honesty and showing up like where you are. The other thing is, is I think it's like when I say, I don't mean that I was super self deprecating. I think I was honest about where I'm at in the journey, but also honest about my passion and my belief that it was going to work. Because I do think that that is a really important distinction. I don't want to hear people say like, "Do this like... I have a whole chapter in the book called, I think it's called ... I should know this. I think it's called Wow Before How, or something like that.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah.

Liz Bohannon: But it's all about... Zig Ziglar, I think, he talked about this. He's like a very famous like sales guru. And he talked about this, the cap, the ceiling for how passionate and how much somebody can believe in your own idea. And you have to take responsibility for that. There are far too many people that are walking around, and they're like, "I'm going to casually throw an idea out there and see..." In fact, this happened just recently. My husband and I are always coming up with business ideas. It's kind of like our side hobby. Is we're just always like other brands and whatever. We were talking about it on this silly idea that we had, and we were talking about it with some friends. And we just threw it out. No one was like ... We just threw it out so casually. And no one in the room was like, "That's so brilliant."

Liz Bohannon: There's this part of you that's like, "Well, that's must not be good." Because no one was like, "Oh my gosh, that's amazing." And then I like, "I'm the annoying person who was like, I'm recalling my own words to myself in the book that I just wrote," that it's like, I wouldn't sell it. We didn't talk about what the problem was. We didn't talk about the solution. We didn't talk about why it was so awesome. And so many people do that. They're like, "I don't want to look stupid. So I'll just like throw an idea out there. And if people love it and they go crazy on it, then that'll be my validation that it's a really good idea." And it's like, "Nope, this is your baby. This is on you. No one will ever be more excited about what you are building about the problem that you see, about the solution that

you're offering than you. So if you stop at level 3 out of 10 no one will ever surpass you. That's it."

Liz Bohannon: The most excited anybody will ever get about your idea is a level three. It is on you to take it to a level 12. And then if you're lucky, some people rise up there like with you. So I'm sure when I was very honest about the fact that I was living in my car and we weren't cashflow positive, I also was casting a vision for like, but here's why we're doing is going to change the industry of fashion. Here's how this is going to change the game for women and girls across the globe. And it's kind of on us to strike that balance between being honest with our failures and with our current struggles, but then also like bringing the enthusiasm and the passion to our ideas so that other people can join alongside of us. You could ask Seth why he picked me. That's my that's my bet.

Carey Nieuwhof: Couple of insights after spending some time and all that. What what did you pick up? What are some life lessons? Yeah, I know, with Seth. I mean-

Liz Bohannon: A lot of the book... I think it's in the chapter where I talk about being more focused on problems than solutions that I actually even referenced the time that I spent with Seth, because that was incredibly valuable to me. Is kind of this idea that it's like we think solutions are the gold. But the reality is, it's the people that have the ability to see really interesting problems that are more valuable, that end up creating more valuable, robust and relevant solutions, because they're listening in a way. That kind of this whole idea of having a worm's-eye view versus a bird's-eye view, which is kind of design thinking speak. But just like putting your idea out there and iterating and evolving, which is a lot of what the book, kind of the premise of the book.

Liz Bohannon: So much of that was really influenced by Seth and by by that. I mean, I was with him when my business was less than a year old. So I just feel so incredibly grateful that a lot of those mentalities and mindsets that could have taken me many, many years to learn, I kind of feel like I had a little bit of a head start from his wisdom. Now, the awesome thing is, is you don't have to spend a week with Seth Godin. You can read his books and follow him. He's on Instagram right now. Actually, he just got on Instagram.

Carey Nieuwhof: I was going to say, I haven't seen him on Insta.

Liz Bohannon: ...on Instagram right now, because he just does these like little mini blogs. They're brilliant and he's brilliant, and it's my favorite post on Instagram.

Carey Nieuwhof: I call him calorie dense. There he is. Okay. I followed. Thank you.

Liz Bohannon: There you go.

Carey Nieuwhof: He's been on for 20 minutes and as 150 followers, so. Hey, when when you type in Seth into Google and Seth Godin comes up, like when you get down to a first

name, and like the internet just kind of leads you there, then you know you probably made a contribution, which is what happens when you Google Seth, you end up on his stuff. So that's pretty cool. Liz, this has been fascinating. The book is a great read. It's called Beginner's Pluck. It just came out very recently and anything else you want to share before we wrap up?

Liz Bohannon: I don't think so. You can find me on Instagram is where I interact the most. I'm just @lizbohannon. The name of my company is Sseko Designs. That's, S-S-E-K-O Designs. We just dropped our holiday collection. It's beautiful. Consumers are going to spend billions and billions and billions of dollars here in the next couple of weeks on Christmas presents and on the holidays. And just really encourage you, whether that's with Sseko or someone else, to think about like every dollar that you spend is a vote for how you want the world to work. And there are amazing brands. You don't have to choose anymore between making a positive impact in the world and having a really cool product that someone's going to love and it's going to be an awesome gift.

Liz Bohannon: So whether that is checking out Sseko Designs online and looking at our beautiful holiday collection for any of the women in your life, or just putting an extra bit of time into being really conscious this holiday season, with the billions and billions of dollars that the world wants to stand beside about dignity and worthiness of the people's products. Just a reminder that every single product you own was made by someone and that someone was either treated with dignity and respect or not. And we get an opportunity to be a part of deciding how we want the world to work. So really encourage you here going into the holiday season.

Carey Nieuwhof: It's been so encouraging. Can you just, I know lots of people look at the show notes, but just in case, can you spell Sseko one more time for us? Just to say that people get it right?

Liz Bohannon: S-S-E-K-O Designs. Ssekodesigns.com.

Carey Nieuwhof: Liz, I'm so grateful for this conversation. Thank you for the difference you're making for the encouragement to leaders. It is a great leadership book as well as a great story. So thank you.

Liz Bohannon: I appreciate that so much. Thanks.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, I told you that was fascinating. Wasn't that a great story? And if you want more, we've got show notes and also transcripts at CareyNieuwhof.com/Episode315. And of course we've got some fresh episodes coming up as well. John Mark Comer is on next week, I'll explain that in a moment. But if you haven't yet taken advantage of the offers we have for you, you can apply to the next Ascent Leader cohorts by going to TheAscentLeader.org and apply to be in a very small cohort that will spend meaningful time with Jud Wilhite, Craig Groeschel and Judah Smith. I have been

a part of these cohorts, they're incredible. You must apply, and if you haven't done that yet, go to TheAscentLeader.org to do so today. And then head on over to MinistryGrid.com/Carey, get the free exclusive courses I developed for them. And if you finish it, a copy of my book, *Didn't See It Coming* and see all the good things they have there. So go to MinistryGrid.com/Carey for more on that.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, next week John Mark Comer, somebody who I really have become acquainted with over the last year. I met his partner in crime Mark Sayers when I was in London, England. Haven't met John Mark face-to-face, but man, we had a great conversation. The first 15 minutes alone blew my mind because I got him to feedback on something that he and Mark Sayers talked about on there This Cultural Moment podcast on Secular Salvation. But we talk about post-Christian America and also the discipline of ruthlessly eliminating hurry from your life. You're not going to want to miss next week's episode. Here's an excerpt.

John M. C.: I mean, yeah, my life is radically different. I work way less hours. So I probably work 40, 45 hours a week, when I used to work insane hours. My mornings are radically different. I don't let myself touch my phone most days, if everything goes well, till 9:30 in the morning. And so every morning, I have several hours to pray, to sit in the quiet and then to read for an hour and to do some deep work. And that's been a radical ... When I was at the height of that business, I didn't have time to read, I barely had any time to pray. My mornings were hurried and stress.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well guys, I'll tell you, I could not be more excited about this lineup. Super proud of our five years of archives, and those are always available. But man, we have some great guests. So if you haven't subscribed yet, please do so. Craig Groeschel, who I've already talked about today, he's on the show in a few weeks. We also have Lysa TerKeurst, which I'm super excited about. Claire Diaz-Ortiz, Adam Duckworth who is just killing it in the travel industry these days. Gary Thomas, Mark Driscoll.

Carey Nieuwhof: Who else? Mark Miller from Chick-fil-A. Dan Reiland, Nir Eyal who blew up Silicon Valley with his book, *Hooked*, and has written an incredible new book called *Indistractable*. All that comes your way on whatever platform you most prefer, Apple, Spotify. Well, wherever you listen to podcasts. And if this episode helped you, I would love it if you shared that and let other people know. In the meantime, we're going to keep working ahead on all this stuff to bring you the very best in leadership we possibly can. Thanks so much for listening guys, and I hope our time together today helps 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.

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