

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 322 of the podcast. My name is Carey Nieuwhof. I hope our time together today helps you lead like never before. Today's episode is brought to you by Pro Media Fire and ReThink Leadership. My guest is Dr. James Emery White. I'm so glad to have him back on the podcast. We talk about why he decided to shut down all but the original location of his church. Yeah, he de-multi-sited his church, which is really interesting.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, in an era where churches are launching campuses and restaurants are opening locations and we seem to be going national with a lot of organizations, why did he choose to shut things down? We're going to talk about that. Is that a trend? Is it not a trend? Also, we talk about how to grow your church younger when the leader gets older and the future of digital outreach, and why James Emery White is investing so much money in the digital future.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So it's going to be a really fascinating conversation. Leaders, I'm so glad that you tuned in. We also have a brand new segment called What I'm Thinking About, and at the end of the show if you listen right through to the end, I am going to talk about one of the problems that plagues a lot of us who have control freak tendencies and how to get over it. So, if you're a control freak, why do you do that? I've got a theory I want to share with you at the end of the show today. So, if you listen to all the way til the end, you'll get that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Subscribers, thank you so much for subscribing. Thank you for sharing with your friends on social, getting a lot of traction these days and for every rating and review, thank you so much, guys. We are so grateful for those. You getting the word out helps us do this even better for more leaders. And to serve you better, I'm flying all over the country doing some really fascinating interviews this winter and spring and I can't wait to bring them to you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, you know challenges arise all the time in leadership and Vista Community Church, a growing church with a couple of campuses ran into a problem recently. The communications director handling all of the graphic design and social media left. Do you ever have that thought as like a senior leader? It's like what if this guy walks out, huh, what do you do? Well, looking back at this critical moment, their executive pastor Chris Kelly said, "Pro Media Fire saved us at a time when we didn't have the manpower or expertise to express ourselves the way we wanted, Pro Media Fire came to the rescue."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Chris purchased the media bundle and that includes custom monthly graphics, social media and video within a day, literally a day the church had an entire creative team working for them at less than the cost

of the previous staff member. Crazy, right? So, whether you're a small, mid-size, or large church, Pro Media Fire can help you for less than the cost of hiring someone on your own for a 10% off discount for life. Head on over to this website, podcast listeners, you get treated VIPs. Go to ProMediaFire.com/Carey, that's ProMediaFire.com/Carey.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Hey guys, I love being on the road because I get a chance to connect with you. One of my favorite events of the year happens April 29th to May 1st in Atlanta. It's ReThink Leadership and don't think conference, think this is like entirely different than a lot of events you've been to. We don't have a lot of hype. There's no music. There's no production. Well, I mean, we have lights and sound and that kind of stuff, but like it's not a whole bunch of hype. It's just really solid leadership content, community and conversation for a couple of days.

Carey Nieuwhof:

This year Simon Sinek is one of our keynote speakers. Dharius Daniels will be there, Mark Batterson. We've got Gordon MacDonald coming down. Yeah so, many of you have loved that episode. Gordon MacDonald, Angela Santomero. She is the creator of Blue's Clues and Daniel Tiger's neighborhood. Jon Acuff, Chris Hodges, myself, Dan Reiland, so many others. I am so excited to welcome you to that, and because you're a podcast listener, you get a discount 20% off if you head on over to ReThinkLeadership.com and register your team with the code RL20CAREY. That's RL20CAREY at ReThinkLeadership.com.

Carey Nieuwhof:

The offer expires next week, February 29th so make sure you head on over there and get that before it's gone. This event always sells out, so go to ReThinkLeadership.com. It is open to executive pastors, senior pastors, campus pastors, and business leaders. I would love to see you there in Atlanta April 29th through May 1st. Well, without much further ado, let's jump into my conversation with James Emery White. Jim, welcome back to the podcast.

James Emery White:

Thank you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Good catching up with you before we get started. I want to start ... you caught quite a few headlines, at least in church leader circles last year when you announced that you were shutting down all the locations to your church, sort of consolidating, amalgamating back into one location. You lead a very large church in Charlotte. What really intrigued me about that was it seems to be a counter cultural or counter trend move. This seems to be the era where everybody, if you own a restaurant, you're opening more locations. If you own a business, you're opening multiple locations. If you have church, you're opening multiple locations and you pivoted and did the other thing. So, can you just give us a bit of context on that and then tell us what happened.

James Emery White:

Sure. Well, the context is we were one of the pioneers in the multi-site movement. We had our first site, second site back in 2003.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That was early days.

James Emery White:

That was early, and May of last year we closed all of them at the same time coordinating-

Carey Nieuwhof:

How many was all of them, Jim?

James Emery White:

Four.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay.

James Emery White:

So, we closed them and it was not out of crisis, it wasn't out of failure. It wasn't out of anything at all. It was after several months of very strategic reflection. Most of the sites were actually growing rather nicely. But here's the key for us and we can talk more about the specific reasons why we did this, but the question that I always keep as a leader and I think every leader does. If I have a finite amount of resources, I have a finite amount of staff, team, money, time, and I've got it all going toward this endeavor, and if I start sensing that even if that's bearing fruit, if I start sensing that I might could bear more fruit doing this, well, I'm going to start really being ruthless in evaluating what I'm currently doing.

James Emery White:

I think that's what I hope marks my leadership and whether it marks me or not, I think it marks good leadership is that you're constantly evaluating methodologies and you're not wired to them. There are no sacred cows. So, you're always looking at methodologies saying, is this the best way to achieve the mission and to reach the goal. So, I began to sense probably two years ago that I had question marks about this was the best use of our funds.

James Emery White:

Well to finish the narrative since we closed the sites, we baptized over 400 people last year. We had our largest set of Christmas services ever. We had our largest growth quarter October through December of '19 compared to October through December of '18. We grew by around 20%, and when you're our size, that's a staggering number.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Your age, because your church is how old?

James Emery White:

Yeah. We started in '92.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, exactly. So, I mean if that was a two-year old church that would be way more predictable than a church that's been around for almost three decades.

James Emery White:

Or when you're our size too because a lot seems harder it is to get those. But I don't say that to point out anything other than for us closing the sites did not hurt us. In fact, it accelerated the speed of our growth, and we had just a fantastic run since we've done it. We've talked about why we did it, but that's kind of the story.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Let's go back to two years ago because I know that feeling as a leader, not necessarily to shut down your locations, but every once in a while I'm sure you're really excited about it when you launch them the whole deal. What were the first stirrings that made you go, huh, I wonder if this ... It's time to change. What were some of the first stirrings?

James Emery White:

This isn't always the way it works, but in this particular case, it was wanting to invest in some things that I thought held enormous promise and I didn't have the resources to do it because I had the bulk of these resources going toward this, and so that got me frustrated. So, I just wanted to make sure that this really was the best use of these resources. So, bringing the ark days, here we had an enormous amount of money going toward our sites and I wanted to do more and more and more in light of the digital revolution, and one more in light of the app and the website and social media and that kind of marketing and I didn't have the resources to do the kinds of things I wanted to do.

James Emery White:

Then I began to look at our database and how the database, most databases these days are completely outdated, and what it would take to write our own to be able to do with everything I wanted it to do and to work seamlessly, particularly with mobile technology. So, on and on this began to go and I just began to just say, "Okay, I'm going to start from scratch. If I wanted to grow the church the most effectively, is this really where I would put my money?" You mentioned something earlier that is true, but I'm going to beg to differ a little bit on it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, go ahead.

James Emery White:

Which is saying that we're in an age where churches are just increasingly going multi-site and restaurants are adding locations and all that. Let me give you another way to think about. Think about the banking industry. Banking industry is closing branches like crazy because they're realizing that people are going to bank on their phone and so their old model was bricks and mortar. Their old model was if we don't have a branch every five miles maybe, we're going to lose customers because everything's based on the branch model.

James Emery White:

Now, they can't close them fast enough because they only need branches for very specific things and almost everything is now online and it's done through your phone. See for my thinking, that's something worth looking at as an enterprise as much as the other side where it seems like people can't expand physically enough. So, I think that we're in the midst of a digital revolution that is changing everything and it's changing how people explore church. Is it changing how churches reach out? It's changing everything and for us we wanted to divert our resources toward that, and so far so good.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, I want to come back to the whole digital part and I want to camp there, but before we get to it, I want to unpack the decision making because I think there's two things going on. There's the actual decision that you're making, which is okay, we got four locations, we're going to shut three down and go back to one or move forward into one. But there's also the other leadership thing, and maybe we'll go there first, which is you're going to change something you started.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I've always thought in leadership it's pretty easy to go in. Like if I was your successor, okay, just to role play for a second, it's not that hard. You want to honor the past and say thank you very much. But as a leader you kind of want to make it your own. So yeah, this is the way Jim used to do it, but here's how we'll do it now, et cetera, and it's pretty normal in leadership. But when you have started something, it takes a certain degree of humility and courage I think, to say, "Yeah, we're not going to do it that way anymore." Can you walk us through that process or maybe that wasn't a big deal for you?

James Emery White:

It's interesting. I don't want to sound cold, but I'm very cold-hearted toward methodology. What would break my heart is if a successor came in and wanted to change the DNA of our values or our mission or our customer, but I'm actually the nastiest person toward methodologies around, and just has never bothered me to kill something successful if I don't feel like it's actually successful for the mission reaching who it is who we're wanting to reach, so size never has appealed to me.

James Emery White:

I did have a dark moment or two when it became clear that it was the wisest thing for us to close the sites and move toward a different direction. I had a moment where I thought, well but what are the optics going to be? And not necessarily for Mecklers because they get it, but okay, so this church down that street or that church over in that state, or these people are going to say, "Oh, Meck must not be doing good. He's closing all the sites. Did you hear what happened?"

James Emery White:

When I actually realized that, that dark thought came into my mind, it might actually alter the decision. It was literally a moment where I said, "Satan flee," because if I start caring about that, then not only am I going to be a terrible leader, but I'm not going to be following the promptings of the Holy Spirit, and you almost have to have a moment where, not to be crude, but you have to say, "Screw optics." It's just the heck with it because I don't care. I'm doing this for an audience of one, I'm doing this to build this church and I'm not on a crusade to say that everybody ought to do this. I think multi-sites working in a lot of places and is working for you, do it.

James Emery White:

It was working for us. I just sensed something could work better and I only had X amount of time and resources. So yeah, the decision making process was a journey. I would say that it did, gosh, I don't want to sound self-serving. It did take personal courage for me, but for all the wrong reasons based on my own sin.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well no, I get that and that's why I asked the question because I think there is an implicit assumption in leadership that bigger is better. It's not always true. That more is better than fewer. I think it does take at least a suspension of pride or swallowing your pride to be willing to be misunderstood. To say, "Yeah, we went from four to one." I mean, that's not always the progression in leadership. So, thank you for going there, because I do think sometimes we back ourselves into corners as leaders simply because we don't want to admit that what doesn't appear to be progress might actually be progress.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I used to have two podcasts and then I'm like, ah, and the other one was doing okay, but I'm like, "Yeah, I'm just going to do one," and then I gave the other one away, right? It will probably get resurrected this year by a new leader. It's like, "Yeah, that's okay. I used to do two. The one didn't work out the way I hoped. I'm just going to shut it down." That took a moment and I had a moment like you were. I'm like, "Well, what would people say?" And then I thought, well, that's not actually the metric, right?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay. So, back to ... Now, you had unique circumstances in Charlotte because you and I've had this conversation before, when we were just coaching a group of leaders, talk about one of the specific factors that made this possible.

James Emery White:

Yeah. I can very quickly tell you the six big reasons why we did this, and I can do this very quickly. One, I felt it was a dated approach, dated in light of the new digital realities. One of the things that I blogged about and written about is that, the multi-site again explode or be on the scene in the 1990s, late '90s, the first book came out in like, 03 or 04, things of that nature, our first site was 2003. The iPhone wasn't released till 2007. I mean, the whole revolution happened after this began to be explored as a strategy. So, in one sense it sounds weird to say multi-site is dated, but from a technological standpoint in terms of how that's changed the game, yes, it's dated.

James Emery White:

Second, it's a physical approach in a digital world. The whole reason for the multi-site was that you were trying to remove physical barriers. For us at least, it was all about making it easier for someone who attends mass to invite a friend and to check things out. Now, the only way a friend who was invited could check things out was a physical visit, back when we started. I mean, it was a physical thing. So, the multi-site was a physical reaction to a physical barrier.

James Emery White:

Well, it's a physical approach now in a digital world that is not how someone is forced to church, and it's not even how our people intuitively invite people. They're going to go online; they're going to check out an online campus service. They're going to explore you that way. All of that is before they ever physically

dock in your doorstep. Then that means that they're already something of a fan, somewhat already intrigued, already have something that they like because they've checked you out online.

James Emery White:

So that makes the third thing, the 20-minute rule more obsolete. It used to be said that if somebody is 20 minutes or more away from your physical campus, they're just not going to do it. So you need to have physical campuses every 20 minutes. Well, the only reason a campus, for example, works for someone like us is because 20 minutes away we've got a body of people who like Meck, who can invite their friends to that campus. So, we already know that once someone's a fan, they'll drive 20 minutes or more. That's how come you start a site there. Now, if somebody now becomes a fan online and they like the talks, they like the services, that's how they checked you out. Driving 25, 27 minutes is not a big deal anymore, so we're not having to fix that barrier.

James Emery White:

The fourth thing, which is what you alluded to is that for a lot of churches it is a situational need. They don't have the capacity to absorb the crowd, there's not good roads. They're in the process of a relocation. There's a whole bunch of reasons why this could be the case. For us it was the outer belt. Charlotte's outer belt project was why we bought the 80 acres that we're on. We've got 80 acres and we bought it because the outer belt has a destination exit, one mile from here and it was dreamlike and we got the property and the only reason that property was available because it was an assemblage of two pieces of property and there was like a 50 acre piece and like a 30 acre piece and it was a 30 acre piece that made it so valuable and worthwhile.

James Emery White:

It was owned by a farmer who said, "I will sell to anybody but a developer." So, I went knocked on his door one day and about an hour later after some lemonade and iced tea, I got the assemblage, and after that got public, we had developers offering us three times what we paid for it within 90 days. So, we got the largest piece of land left in Charlotte at the time.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And this was in the '90s.

James Emery White:

Yeah. You don't find 80 acres in a city like Charlotte, so it's just not there. So, but dang, if the outer belt took forever to be built, we're talking years and years and years. It didn't get completed until like 2015 and then the infrastructure that served our campus didn't get completed until last year. So, suddenly what was a 45-minute drive to get here was now like 13 minutes, 12 minutes. I mean, it's changed everything.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, when it was completed, the city shrunk.

James Emery White:

For us.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

James Emery White:

For us. Then, another thing that happened for us was that we did a massive survey of our people, of several thousand of our attenders and we just asked them series of questions and we found that they were intuitively inviting their friends to online or digital things before a physical. And if they did invite them to a physical, they were bringing them here to this originating campus. They didn't feel a site near them was needed to reach their unchurched friends. We just found that we were giving them a tool they didn't ask for, they didn't need, they didn't want, and the Mecklers that were attending our sites were doing it out of faith, most of the mission because we asked them to.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Really. Okay. Can I ask, and you may not know the answer to this question because it's probably data driven, but when did that ... because you said something really significant there. You said that people are tending to invite their friends online before they invite them in person. Do you know when that shift would have happened?

James Emery White:

Oh, I think that started for us about three or four years ago, but I think now it's just the norm. I mean, this just the way everybody talks.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It is like, "Here's the link, check it out," right? Like when do you go to a restaurant you haven't even either been to Yelp or their site, right? To check it out. You'll do that.

James Emery White:

Yeah. When you check the social media feeds, I mean, Mecklers are very active inviters, but it's always, "Hey, check it out online, check it out online, check it out online." Then once you check it out, "Did you like it? Oh, great. Well, come with me."

Carey Nieuwhof:

They were inviting to the broadcast location, just so that people who might not be familiar, that's the big like, hundred thousand square foot, whatever, as opposed to your sites would have been a little smaller and a little more regional.

James Emery White:

That's another thing that I think is hurting, I think some multi-site approaches, which is there's a little bit of bait and switch. They see this wonderful thing online, they're captivated by it, they go and do a campus near them and then it's that guy on screen, or it's a band that is not as quite as good as what I saw online, and it's meeting in a YMCA, and it's just not quite the same online experience. One of the things that we've found that has accelerated things is that if the online experience, there's not a drop off, there's actually a step up when you physically experience it. That if anything is better.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay. So, if you go to your broadcast location, people perceive it as better, but is that what you're saying?

James Emery White:

You want them to.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. You want them to.

James Emery White:

You want to have them experience something not experiencing online. You don't want them to feel like it dropped.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right. Yeah, and that's arguably what was happening at some of your sites is ...

James Emery White:

I would imagine it would, I would imagine that was happening at sites all over the world.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

James Emery White:

It's very difficult for every site to have equal quality and if you're doing what most people do, which is to have live and then all of the sites be video venues, then you automatically have a different experience because it's a video venue. So, the last reason, the sixth reason was after those was that we were taken with the potential of investing in all things digital and just felt like it was just going to be a better investment.

Carey Nieuwhof:

For all those reasons, now, were you expecting growth when you did the big switch last year?

James Emery White:

No, I expected a hit. Well, let me just put it this way. I didn't know fully what to expect, but I anticipated losing a certain percentage from all the sites. I anticipated a drop in income. I anticipated, well at least these are the things that we worked to try to offset people who put blood, sweat and tears into those sites feeling betrayed, but it ended up where by God's grace and a lot of careful work on the front end talking to people individually and honoring people and just the way we did this. The work that we did months before it was even made public so that it's like when we finally made the decision, everybody already knew except maybe the crowd.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But all your body and people, all your volunteers, your key donors, yeah.

James Emery White:

We were able to keep all of our full time staff. We were able to keep and found new places for them. Now, another thing too that made this easier for us and some is that all of our sites were admitted facilities. So, we didn't have to extricate ourselves from real estate that we had bought, bricks and mortar that we had built, and so we were able to ... which is something that in hindsight, I'm still glad I did. I've always hesitated to buy land and build a building, even though all the consultants say that's the way to make the site really hum.

James Emery White:

I always hesitated because I just had this sense, but that's going to make it a lot harder to stop this if we want to stop it or move it to another place if we want to move it. There was a permanence to that with this whole thing that I was very hesitant about and now I can say I'm so glad I was hesitant.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You rented for 17 years, 18 years, right?

James Emery White:

Well, depending on the age of the site.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, but up to.

James Emery White:

One of our sites was like three years old. Yes, we were in schools. We were in YMCAs. We were in places like that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Talk about the change management. Okay. One question before I get there. Did you have a number in your head of, "Okay, we're probably going to take out 5% hit, 20% hit." Did you have a number in your head of what you thought the cost of this would be?

James Emery White:

I didn't. I just knew that I was going to work really hard to keep it as low as possible. But if you had told me that we were going to close the sites and if anything, it would just like take off.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right.

James Emery White:

Like higher and hotter than it ever had been I would've made the decision a long time ago. I mean, it was a risk. It was an experiment, and I've had a lot of people ask me, so why did that happen? I mean, is it just ... Why? Because it doesn't make sense to close it all down. I don't have all the answers. There's a lot that we're still processing. This is a lot of wet cement for us. But I will say this, in talking with other pastors of multi-site churches, going multi-sites is hard. It's a very challenging thing as a leader. It's hard.

I found it challenging because it's difficult to lead a site when you can't manage by walking around, and you can't see things and you don't know what's going right or wrong.

James Emery White:

So it's hard to lead. It's hard to find a good site director because you need someone with the personality of a leader, but who isn't able to teach perhaps. I think your focus is dissipated. I don't care how good your staff are. Your senior staff are always thinking about multiple sites and they're all different entities and different personalities and it's difficult. I would say that one of the things that happened with us is when we ended them all, we were able to bring all of that energy and focus to bear on this one thing and it just got electric.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow. So change management is really difficult and you alluded to this earlier in what you were saying. Like naturally, normally just human nature being what human nature is, and the churches, you've got people who just get motivated selfishly and behave immaturely sometimes just like any organization. But there are people who had blood, sweat and tears invested. There are people who are like, "Well now I've got to drive 20 minutes to get to Meck not five minutes. You were in my neighborhood. I'm not sure if my friends will come." How did you navigate? Like what were the steps you rolled out to minimize the impact of a change that would be seen by many as loss?

James Emery White:

Well, I'll tell you a couple of things that we did that any leadership team would have done, but I'll tell you why it works so well for us and there's a big thing there that I want to talk about. We communicated to all the interested stakeholders. We communicated one-on-one. We took out coffees, We explained. We met with serving teams. We did all the due diligence of that. The staff here had been brought along through multiple things, and I had been blogging on it. We've been talking about as a staff. So, everybody knew that this was kind of all just being thought about and explored. We made that legal to do without saying ... without at all hinting about what we felt the end was going to be because we honestly didn't know.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, it was like an open discussion.

James Emery White:

It was. So, we let it be that and we let it be where we were talking about these months before the decision was made. So, the decision for all of the leadership, it was almost anti-climactic. By the time we got about it, the six-month mark, really valuating it everybody was feeling the same way. It's like, "Oh my gosh, I mean, when are we going to close the sites and come on, come on, let go and close them." I said, "No, no, no, no. We got to do this at the right time, the right way and we need to over communicate."

James Emery White:

So, we went through all those kinds of steps, but here's the key. We really did have a culture where everybody realized it's all about the mission. The methods are not what's protected and our forward mantra, it's not about me. So, that was so much a part of our culture that all I had to do really is stand

up and say, "Guess what? This is one of those moments like we've had so many times before where we're going to shift for the sake of reaching lost people because we think we can reach more. It's not about us. This is a critical change, it's going to be for the mission." I mean, that's it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow.

James Emery White:

All I did was when I did a little two-week series just to remind everybody about that stuff and it was just played off the ABC thing. We just called it, This is Us and I did two weeks to say, "Okay, let me remind you, this is us. Here are our values. Here's our mission, here's things. So, this is just part of all that." Not a peep and we kept almost probably 90 plus percent of all of our sites, maybe more. In fact, the other day I met with some of our site leaders and they can only point each one to maybe two or three families that they know of that were lost at every site at best.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow. Yeah, and that would show up by this point in your donor data, in your volunteer data, you would see if there was some kind of exodus that was significant. Did anybody really like raise the placards and start protesting or did you get angry emails or you really didn't see that?

James Emery White:

No, not one. Everybody got it. Because it was put in the context of, "Look, all we're trying to do is fulfill the mission." That's what we've been about all these years and we've made a lot of other changes. In fact, we even have, as part of our membership class and all of our gateway classes, we will say things like, "Look, we're glad that you're here. We're glad that you like the service. Let me go ahead and make sure you understand. I can't even promise you that, that's the kind of music style we're going to have in six months. I can't tell you whether or even the weekend's going to be the front door anymore, but whatever the front door is, we're going to open it. So, understand if you are attracted to us stylistically, methodologically, you need to hold it like this because that is always changing."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Isn't that interesting?

James Emery White:

Told that at the very beginning.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's something that resonates with me. That's the kind of leader I am. It's like people ask me, "Wow, 10 million downloads, you're going to do podcasting forever?" I'm like, "I don't know." Right now podcasting is working. It's reaching a lot of people, but there'll be a day where hopefully we'll get on it before it crests and declines, but there's going to be something else. What I'm interested in, I'm not interested in podcasting. I'm interested in interviewing world-class leaders and dissecting leadership and bringing that to as many people as possible.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, what's best forum for that? I don't know. We'll find the best forum for it. Right now seems to be podcasting. So, it's a similar methodology and I think it's hard, particularly over almost three decades now, not to get wedded to your methods because I see so many leaders get there. But it sounds like you really bake that in to your culture throughout. How have you kept reinforcing that so that the point where you get to, I don't know whether, other than closing the church or I don't know, like that is a major decision is what I'm trying to say.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Like there are a few more massive decisions you can make as a leader than, "No, we're going to close all the locations and go to one." Like that's huge. Everybody gets impacted, and for it to go with so little opposition is pretty remarkable. So, for leaders listening who maybe are realizing, "Oh no, we're a little more wedded to the method than maybe I thought." How do you change that culture so that the method is secondary?

James Emery White:

I would go back and start casting the vision for the values and the vision and the methodologies. I mean, the mission and I would start getting that ingrained and then say, "Okay, now let's look at our methodologies through this lens and see which ones are really effective." So, if you have promoted ... here's a great example. If you were back in the '90s and you built a church preaching the importance of secret services, and you started a church saying, "We're going to have secret services, we're going to do Willow, we're going to do all this stuff," which is what the vast majority of churches started in '90s did. That was their thing. We're going to go with this approach.

James Emery White:

So, we're going to do this. Well then when the sea shift went away from the classic secret targeted service, which was all presentational and not experiential, and it was one short course at best and get out of it. What was best to reach the lost began to be more experiential, began to be less attractional or even lower secret services moved to attractional, then that moved to something different more experiential. If you were riding that cultural crest and you wanted to make that shift, you could have had a whole bunch of people cry foul because they associated doing a secret service with the mission.

James Emery White:

So, if you as a leader said, "No, no. Here's the mission, reach lost people through the local church. Right now this is the method, but that may not be the way to do it three years from now." Well, if you led that way, then when it did come time to change the way you did weekends, and we had that moment where we canceled our midweeks, we changed our weekends, I sensed it all happening culturally. We began to be much more experiential and participatory on the weekends. A lot of other things began to change and they're still changing. Drama moved to film and all other kinds of things. Now, our services now are radically different than they were even 12 months ago.

James Emery White:

In fact, our services are becoming very eclectic. So if you'd come one weekend and say, "Oh, they're into acoustic." No, come next weekend you'll see something different because that's part of the way people are too. My point is though, is that we never had anybody cry foul because the way we did it was we always made the methods servant to the mission. But if you start off saying, here's the method and this is what killed and hurt the Southern Baptist convention so bad is that they made Sunday school

orthodoxy. They made Sunday school equivalent with being Orthodox and evangelistic. So, if you didn't want to do Sunday school, then somehow you were anti-Jesus, or in some churches if you don't want to do small groups, so now you're heretical. Well-

Carey Nieuwhof:

I've gotten some of those emails.

James Emery White:

Yeah, don't worry. Scripture doesn't say thou shall be in a small group. It's the one another's that we're to go after. Small groups are methodology. Sunday schools are methodology. Men's ministry is a methodology. It's all methodology. We only have one mission, is to evangelize the lost and to assimilate the evangelize and then disciple the assimilated and then unleash the disciple. That's flywheel. That's it, and so everything else is secondary.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, a lot of leaders that might be clear in their head, but what it feels like to me Jim, is that you have spent a lot of time or enough time casting that vision to the entire church. I was just listening to a podcast today with Donald Miller, who I almost never miss an episode StoryBrand podcast. He was interviewing our mutual friend, Jeff Henderson, and Don made a really good point. He said, "Business leaders need to learn from church because leading a church is highly complicated." Like if you're running a business, right? With 10,000 people, 10,000 employees, somebody is really out of line you fire them.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You've got really 70 paid staff-ish, maybe 100, and everybody else is a volunteer. They can walk and actually you're asking them to give money. So, you want to talk about a complex and serve and give and invite their friends. Like you want to talk about complicated leadership. That's complicated leadership. So, what have been some of the keys that you've had to getting that many people to a place where they're like, "Oh yeah, well that wasn't the mission anyway, that was just a method." How do you do that?

James Emery White:

You've got to be able to explain it. You've got to be able to help them understand and constantly teach and constantly cast that vision and constantly address when the thinking gets fuzzy. You have to spend a disproportionate amount of energy on it. I've often said that, when you're dealing with the depraved church and every church is depraved, you have to spend a disproportionate amount of energy on those things that involve death of self.

James Emery White:

So, I don't have to spend any time or energy on trying to help people get their felt needs met. So, I have to spend a big amount of energy to die to themselves, to live for somebody else, to have this, it's not about me mentality. But if you can cast that vision in an altruistic way where they feel like this is the better form of themselves. Like if you almost cast it in a way like, okay, when you start feeling selfish and you want it about you and you're clinging to this, hey, you're better than that. You're better than that.

James Emery White:

You care more about the kingdom enough. You're one of these people with a towel over their arm. You're not one of these narcissistic types. You're one that's willing to die on the sale for the sake of others because somebody died on that hill for you. So, this is what I believe about you. This is the way we're going to be. I think when you can cast that vision in a way that inspires people to where they want to give sacrificially and they want to ... that's almost like the good thing to do, then that's the key.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, man, I got a lot of questions I want to ask you. But just before we leave this question of consolidating into one site, there's a lot of leaders listening who have multiple locations, whether that's, restaurant, church leaders, et cetera, et cetera, and you did say that this is more descriptive, but there's a little bit of prescriptive there. There's a little bit like, yeah, maybe you should take a look at this. What would you say to leaders who are in multiple locations are thinking about it? What is a helpful filter or decision making framework that you'd suggest they should look at?

James Emery White:

Do you really have a physical barrier? Really have a physical barrier to outreach and this is the only solution. Second, when you're at your best and you're praying most diligently and your most humble before God, is this a vanity project?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, wow. Yeah.

James Emery White:

So that I can say I'm multi-site. So, I can say I'm a church with multiple locations because that's the it factor. Third, if the reason you wouldn't shut it down is because of optics and pride and how it would look and how people might talk outside of the church and church world. But if you knew you could shut it down and that wouldn't be looked down on, you know it would be best and you'd do it in a heartbeat. If these are the kinds of questions. I hear some people whenever anybody says anything about multi-site, and you're right. When we made our decision, a couple of other churches did around the same time and it collectively made some news.

James Emery White:

There were some people that almost felt like they had to go protect multi-site turf. Like, we've got to protect the turf. It's like, who cares? I'm not going after you, I don't care whether you're multi-site or not, I'm not trying to tear it down. If it works for you, yay, guard it. If door to door visitation and Sunday school works, bus ministry works for you, I'm going to be your biggest fan. I'm just saying that nothing's sacred, and for us it made sense because of these realities that I think are facing all churches. I really do.

James Emery White:

I don't think the main barrier any more is physical, I think it's digital. I think that when you look at the amount of money and time and bricks and mortar that it takes, most churches, their sites are running 300, 400 each and they're not like tearing it all down, it's is there something better? Now, granted, you may not be sitting on 80 acres. You may not be able to expand. I get all that. I'm not trying to make

Meck ... I have no interest or need for everybody to do what we did. But I think every pastor who knows what's going on in our world needs to evaluate this very, very carefully, simply because of stewardship.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I think the vanity question is a great one to ask generally in leadership and for anybody thinking of launching. It's infinitely more complicated to lead multiple sites than it is a single site, and it's a great question. You want to do this. We all want to be one of the cool kids at some level. But is that really the motivation? Oh, man, those are great questions. So, let me ask you a hypothetical, would you ever launch another location if it meant reaching more people and if so, under what circumstances?

James Emery White:

I'll do it in a heartbeat.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

James Emery White:

I'll do it in a heartbeat. I mean, and I wouldn't feel awkward about it. Like, "Oh, you closed them down, but now you're starting one." I am so dispassionate about that. All I care about is what is most effective and I could easily envision a physical site mattering in the future. Another thing too, Carey, I don't want to digress here, but you know that there's another aspect of this that I hope pastors are thinking about and that is, they're thinking about it theologically in terms of ecclesiology. I think that the multi-site movement, no matter how you feel about it, it does need to be thought through theologically, particularly when you start leaving your city and leaving your area and start like, we're just going to do this all over the place.

James Emery White:

Where does ecclesiology fit into that? The reason that I want to say that is because I think that within certainly evangelical Christianity, ecclesiology is the most neglected doctrine and the one that is treated at the most cavalier way. I do think that there's a much more robust ecclesiology in the New Testament than the average person gives it credit for. I hear some horrific things about ecclesiology.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Can you define ecclesiology as what you mean by that?

James Emery White:

Yes, it's the doctrine of the church. When I say, I work to ecclesiology is that modern American evangelicism was actually birthed largely through the para-church movement, which had a terrible ecclesiology itself. So you have a college chapter of students saying, "We're the church." No, you're not. You're not the church. The church is a very defined entity with entry and exit points with defined leadership and sacraments and there's a whole checklist of things that determines what a church is.

James Emery White:

So, when you started hearing things like, "Well, we're going to home church, or we're going to do this, or we're going to be a church, we're going to have sites all over the place." Think it through really

carefully in terms of what scripture says and the doctrine of the church. We can have honest disagreements about that, but at least think about it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Do you have a document ... You write prolifically, this is why I'm asking. Do you have a blog post or document or anything like that, that would point to some of the essentials of ecclesiology that we could link to in the show notes?

James Emery White:

I write about it extensively. I've had it come up in the blog. Also, we just had an e-book release on the church and culture site called Christ Among the Dragons and just got available as an e-book.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, I saw that.

James Emery White:

Yeah, it's an older book of mine, but it just came out as an e-book, and I have a whole chapter in there where I rant.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay, that's good.

James Emery White:

But where I make it very clear and what tipped it off for me was back when I was president of Gordon Conwell, I was meeting in an office of an executive of a Fortune 500 company, Christian Guide, patent hand, trying to raise money for theological education. I remember he kind of, and I talk about this in that book, tell the story, where he was saying all the things that they were doing as this bottling company and how certain employees were on mission trips and they had hired a chaplain for the company and all these wonderful things. Then he says, he wasn't involved in a church himself because it's almost like he was superior to the church and more spiritual than the church. Then he made this statement, "But after all, we're the church too."

James Emery White:

I just wanted to explode. No, you are not. A bottling company listed on the exchange is not the same as the bride of Christ bristling with energy, pulling together the believers and spiritual gifts. I mean, no, you're not. Oh, my God. You're not the church. So, I do think we need to get back to a doctrine of what is the church. When you have the church and when don't you have the church. When do you have para-church versus the other and just get clean on that. All right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

We'll link to that in the show notes for sure. That'll be worth looking up. That's good. That doesn't come up very often. So, what would be the conditions like hypothetically where you would say, "Okay, here's our new location." Can you think of a couple of preconditions that would have to be met?

James Emery White:

Well, that the barrier really was physical. That we couldn't surround it any other way-

Carey Nieuwhof:

If you had theoretically-

James Emery White:

... And it was in our mission field that God had called us. It was in our mission field. I mean, Charlotte and so if there was legitimate stuff ... And even Charlotte's very divided in terms of covering north and south. But if I felt the barrier truly was physical and there was something that we could do unique, we couldn't do any other way to serve that physically. But even that Carey, I think the future of overcoming the physical barrier is not a bricks and mortar building as much as a pop up event.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh yeah. We did talk about that, last time we talked about that. So, can you talk about pop up events what is-

James Emery White:

I think pop up events ... I mean, the creepy crap breweries and all kinds of places where you'd take the physical to somebody as a way of presenting things in a physical way.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Introducing.

James Emery White:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. We've done pop up Christmas Eves for years.

James Emery White:

Exactly. I think that's going to be more of the future of breaking through physical barriers and even leading them from that to a digital exploration and then to a physical location.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, let's go to where this whole thing has been pointing toward the investment you want to make in digital because that also raises ecclesiological issues as well, which is simply-

James Emery White:

It does.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, like is that actually church? Like what is, and I love asking guests, we don't get to it all the time, but a couple of times a year I'll have a guest on, I'm like, "So is the digital stuff real as a church?" Like

give us your take on digital and why you want to do more and more investing there and what you're doing.

James Emery White:

Because I think that's how you're going to reach people. It is how are you going to reach people. It's how people explore church, it's how people now are having their opinions formed. Everything is online. You look at Generation Z, they don't even buy something on the store or buy anything anyway unless it's online through referrals and other things. Everything is digital these days. Exploration and education and delivery systems and community and education. Everything is online and that's how people do it. It is through their phone. It is through the web, internet.

James Emery White:

So, the front issue is it's an obviously that's where outreach is going to take place. Now, how much of that can actually be church? Well, I think that ... here's what I would encourage people to think and it's where I'm encouraging myself to think. If people say, can you have authentic community online? The answer is it doesn't matter. It is online, it is where community is. So, it's where you have to start is where you have to work. So, what I have to do is reach out and enable online community and work with the online community that is there and then stair step people into the benefits of also physical community because there are aspects of the one another in scripture that really can't be done online or at least maybe not optimally, but there's an awful lot now that can happen with online community that we weren't able to do even two years ago.

James Emery White:

There are apps that are flooding, that's more intimacy and multiple visuals on the screen and interaction that you couldn't have before. So, I think you can have community online. I think there are some aspects of it. We want to stair step them into more physical community, but it's the reality of our day. Same thing with discipleship. Can you disciple someone online? It doesn't matter. That's where you're going to have to disciple them online and it's where you're going to have to at least start and begin. Yes, it's spending time with another person or a married couple critical? Yes, we all know about mentoring and the importance of that.

James Emery White:

But in the day of online education and TED talks and everything else, that's where you're going to ... and podcast, that's where you're going to get educated and you've just got to use that. So, it's just the church getting savvy about these things. Then also realizing that people are using their phone and the apps on the phone as their way of completely navigating a world. This is how they're navigating it, so why fight that? Why not go ahead and facilitate the use of their phones to navigate the experience of say, attending a church?

James Emery White:

So on their way in there they can sign in their kids to children's ministry, they can order a coffee and be waiting for them at the cafe. They can go ahead and download message notes or see what the scripture is going to be. They come in and they're using their phone for all kinds of things, maybe getting parking updates and various other stuff. Then when they go in, they're using their phone to take notes and then they can register right there for class as well. Maybe when they're leaving they get a specialized push notification about next steps that they can take and additional resources. I mean, you can just make it so

incredibly interactive for them and maximize the experience. See, I'd rather see that than have a big sign that says, "Okay, everybody put your phones away and turn them off," because you're shutting them down in a lot of ways that you could be turning them on.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Are these things you're all doing, the things that you just listed?

James Emery White:

This is where we're putting all our energy.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's where the money's going, okay, so this is what's next.

James Emery White:

Yeah, and we've found, like for example, we have what would be considered by almost all standards, a state-of-the-art database, paid a fair amount of money for it. If I told you the brand, there'd be a whole bunch of churches say, "Yep, that's the one that we use." We found that it is absolutely archaic in a digital world. Like our app, it doesn't even work with an app on a phone, and yet the main way that people interact with a website is through their phone. So it's a mobile device. That's the main thing to interact with an app, and the average app is not designed to work with a mobile device.

James Emery White:

So, what we're after is, and we're having now, we got a team of, I think it's like 30 people, software, brilliant people. It's going to take them a year to develop an original database system for us that can house our website, app, ticketings, we have to ticket all of our major events, and all the different, social media and all of our social media feeds, but also all of our digital marketing because we do almost entirely digital marketing. So, there's all one thing and it all talks to each other. Now, that makes sense but you'd be surprised how that just doesn't exist.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. No, I hear what you're saying and I mean that's deeper pockets too, most of the leaders listening would not have the resource for that.

James Emery White:

Yes, and no.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay. Tell me more.

James Emery White:

That's an outsource that would be seven figures.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

James Emery White:

We're paying nothing.

Carey Nieuwhof:

All right. Well, tell me more.

James Emery White:

Volunteers.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow. Seriously?

James Emery White:

They're giving a year of their life.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Man.

James Emery White:

I mean, these are people that are highly motivated, and here's what I love. When I began to say, "Who there has this kind of expertise?" These people stepped up and said, "You know what?" The guy who's spearheading it for us, a volunteer, he said, "Everybody I've talked to is so excited because they finally get to use their area of expertise for the cause of Christ and they never knew if they could."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, Good.

James Emery White:

"I write code. How can that serve Jesus?" Oh my gosh, write code for Jesus. It's okay. So, we actually found out an enormous amount of enthusiasm. So, what we have to invest in is staff to work with volunteers so that they're served and they're cared for but if you were to outsource this to a company, it's seven figures.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, no, I know, I mean immediately I'm like, how much is that costing you? Five, 10 million, like come on.

James Emery White:

Yeah, it's such a privilege.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow. Okay, and so is this something with 30 volunteers that they can do evenings, weekends, breaks, that kind of thing?

James Emery White:

That's the beauty of this because it's all done in their homes and they just coordinate. They're all talking to each other online and through various social media outlets. They can divide and conquer various parts of it. I mean, they give me updates that I understand about 20% of, but they use little words for me, but they're just-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Is this something you would ever make available to other churches once it's mature?

James Emery White:

Yeah, that;s our goal.

Carey Nieuwhof:

A little bit like what Life Church has done with a lot of their stuff is just like, "Here you go, church."

James Emery White:

Yup.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Amazing. Amazing. So, you gave us a little bit of the vision for what this thing can do. You can check in your kids, order your mobile coffee, upload the scripture, take notes, get prompted for your next step on the way out. Anything else you're envisioning where this could go?

James Emery White:

Well, I mean also you want to dovetail with all of your social media and your digital marketing outreach, which we are doing extensively, and so you want to be able to say, "Hey, this person came through this particular Google popup or this Facebook ad or they responded with this particular streaming service that we did something with, like on Pandora or something." So, you want to be able to flow that in and out and then begin to compile, okay, which things worked best for the hardcore unchurched, which worked best for various demographics so that you have that data and you're able to then form very sophisticated outreach attempts through digital marketing, because the beauty of digital marketing is you can be so highly segmented, but you pay for that segmentation. But if you can begin to capture that information yourself, you then don't have to pay a marketing firm for it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right.

James Emery White:

It's just a new day where so much of what you're doing is going to be digital in nature. Small groups might meet online and actually have their Bible study through some type of house chat party app, and we're developing a lot of online tools so that ... The one we're working on right now, it's very cool with our evangelism team is where you go online and you just take a quick survey of questions. Then from that we're able to customize how you might want to best explore Christianity based on the nature of your questions.

James Emery White:

So, we're customizing outreach so that it's totally done by them and they don't feel like somebody's evangelizing them. They feel like they're on a customized exploration and that's keyword. So much of what technology allows you to do is to customize for that individual, and that's exactly what people who are particularly Gen Z are expecting everything to be customized because they grew up in a digital world where everything was customized. So, we are trying to customize discipleship, which is I think good, customize evangelism, customize how best to get you networked and get you assimilated.

James Emery White:

We're able to customize that based on your need, because the way you might assimilate a single parent mom versus a young couple with two kids are very different. The way you would evangelize someone who's a neo-atheist versus someone who's just been burned by judgmentalism is very different. So, you want to be able to customize even your evangelist approaches.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, that's interesting, and that also assumes a lot of, or thought about, "Well, what does the stream for new atheists look like, and for a lapsed Christian and for somebody who quit going to church when they were 18, but still kind of believes or from somebody who comes from a more eclectic, personal, spiritual path," somebody's got to be masterminding that. So, do you have a whole team on that or how's that working?

James Emery White:

That's one of the areas where I'm investing most of my time. One of my jobs is to stay as abreast with the culture as I possibly can. One of my top spiritual gifts is evangelism, and so I'm certainly not doing it alone, but this is where I'm investing an enormous amount of my time and my effort and what little expertise I might have throwing into it. But I've studied the rise of the nuns and written on it. I've studied Generation Z and written on it. I just came out with a book designed specifically for non-Christians, the fruit of many years of listening and working, and we're just kind of trying to put all that into play in a customizable way for people.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, I've got another question on the digital about, I just live in Charlotte. I've got spiritual questions. I stumble on your church website. One of the problems a lot of us have who play in the digital space, which is just about all of us, is yeah, Facebook can track and you can put a cookie there, you can put this there. But at the end of the day, I don't know, it's Jim White and I don't know who you are. Do you have a process, a strategy or a plan on how to get people to identify themselves sooner or is that something you want?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Like even this episode will get listened to by 25,000, 30,000 people in the first 30 days. I don't know who those people are unless you shout out on social going, "Man, love James Emery White. He was great." I have no idea who you are. I can tell you what country you're from. I can tell you what city they live in. I can tell you it's going to be New York, LA, Dallas, Chicago is the top cities, Atlanta, Charlotte, like you know, I know those things, Nashville, but I don't know who it is. So how do you get people to identify?

James Emery White:

We work hard for them to not have to. We work really hard.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, you want to keep it anonymous.

James Emery White:

We want them to feel like they can keep it as anonymous as they want. So, if we put it on the threshold of some of these things, like an evangelism tool, we wouldn't call it an evangelism tool, but it's like we would never say, "Okay, the way you begin is give us your name, your email, phone number."

Carey Nieuwhof:

No email capture on day one.

James Emery White:

Just wouldn't do it. We would just say, and this is one thing that has never changed in working with the unchurched in all the years that I've been doing it. They still don't want to surface until they want to surface. They still want to sit in the back near the exit sign. They still don't want to sing. They might like the participatory atmosphere, but they're not going to be belting out reckless love the first day that they're there. You need to be able to let them do that and then when they're ready to surface, they surface. So yeah, I mean, many, many times. The first time we know that somebody has been poking around for months is when they come out of the waters of baptism.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Mm-hmm (affirmative)

James Emery White:

That's just they're ready to surface or they show up at one of our Meck Institute classes, but we really want the online experience to be wide, wide, wide open and then they can let us know when they're ready because otherwise we could scare them off.

Carey Nieuwhof:

When do people tend to surface? Do they tend to surface online or do they tend to surface in person where it's like ... because I've met in our foyer on a Sunday morning, I'll run into people who will say, "I've been attending for a year online, but this is my first Sunday," and that's more and more common.

James Emery White:

You hear that all the time. Now, the way we work our online campus is different than some. We really treat it like a campus. We call it a campus. We have a campus pastor. We have set times that you have to log in. A lot of people say, why do you do that? We want it to be where the chat room is vigorous. It's monitored by a pastor. We can take prayer requests. You can be prayed with right then. You can interact with other people and ask questions. It's a live event and you have to log in for it. So, it's like you're attending that particular campus event.

James Emery White:

Another reason that we do that and a lot of churches are going to get in trouble I'm afraid that they don't know this. If you just put your service out there to be watched anytime, just throw it out on YouTube or something and you can just watch anytime you want, you got a whole another world of copyright issues. All of a sudden now you've got to be paying us a lot more for the music that's on there and you've got to be doing ... There are certain things that you ... it's a different copyright world.

James Emery White:

Now, I think that, and somebody is going to get sued and it's going to wake everybody up, but if we did that, we'd have to eliminate all the worship and all the other experiences and all the other stuff and it would just be my talk. But when you do it like a service event, you log onto, not only do we feel like it's more of a actual service that we're able to serve those people, but we're able to have the entire experience.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But that almost forces somebody to put their hand up and go, yeah, it's Carey. I mean, they can use fake names and all that.

James Emery White:

They don't have to enter the chat room though either.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, they don't. Okay. So, they can just watch it anonymously without having to enter it. Okay. Got you.

James Emery White:

Yeah, they can surface if they want to in the chat room or they can just not be to have a place where you can anonymously leave a prayer request, but-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay, so you're still giving them choice.

James Emery White:

Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, and you've got the podcast, I'm sure, et cetera, et cetera. So, lots of access points. Anything else on digital? Then I got a couple more questions for you.

James Emery White:

None.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Great.

James Emery White:

If it comes I'll let you know, some questions of mine. I mean, it's such an exploding field that there's almost no limit to talking about all the different ways and different ideas and different things that we're exploring.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It would be easy to think that we're talking to a 29-year old leader here, but you've been at this for three decades and you and I were talking ahead of time. One of the challenges when you reach our stage of life is that a lot of leaders, they're still in position, but the lights went out a long time ago or they just stopped growing and learning in the methodology from the early 2000s or five years ago or 10 years ago, that's the hill they're going to die on.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You're not like that. How do you stay fresh? How do you stay engaged and how do you manage? What are some of the rhythms or disciplines you've used to say that almost three decades in, this thing is still growing double digits and there is a bright future and you're moving into that future with a full tank?

James Emery White:

Two things come to mind. A couple of things come to mind. One is I had an experience that some of your listeners who are familiar with me may remember and that is, that I had a great sojourn where I was president of seminary. I prayed faithfully with that. I also prayed faithfully and felt very obedient to God when that ended, but that cemented for me, I love being a pastor. I love leading Meck. This is what I want to do. It's like some people, if they have a midlife crisis, they go out and buy a red sports car. I was president of a seminary. I always kind of felt like if I never did this, that would be like the dream. I never felt like, it would ever be a possibility, but it's like, "Oh, if I could ever do anything, I would go teach at seminary." A lot of pastors feel that way.

James Emery White:

They love their seminary years and all that. Well, I got the opportunity to be the president of one of the five largest seminaries in North America, the one that's called the Harvard of the seminaries. Okay, I want to go back to Meck so bad, and I won't go into all the details of all the reasons and the ins and outs of that. I mean, it was obviously more complex than that, but it renewed me. It cleansed me. It got whatever wanderlust I had out of me. It rekindled my appreciation for what we get to do and so that was huge.

James Emery White:

In terms of staying, but the other dynamic is that I remember I was asked by a former student of mine, to come and speak at his church, mega church you know the name. I remember, and this was a long time ago. I remember looking out at the crowd and thinking how young it was. I went back the next, and it was just this young, all 20 and 30 somethings. I went back to Meck the next weekend and it was like God had set me up. Every person on stage was 40 or older. Just a fluke, but it was, every person on the stage was. I just said, "This is not going to happen."

James Emery White:

We're not going to be a one and done generational church. I said, we're going to skew young. I don't know if anybody has done it. I don't know how to do it, but we're going to skew young." So, I began to do several things that worked, and so for the last, at least 10 years, we have actually as a church, gotten younger every year, every year we've gotten younger. Now, we are churches almost entirely are people in their 20s and 30s. Meck is almost entirely-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Really?

James Emery White:

I would say two thirds to maybe three fourths of our staff are in their 20s.

Carey Nieuwhof:

How did you do that? What did you do? What were some of the shifts?

James Emery White:

You always attract to your platform. So, very purposely began to platform younger. Also I began to staff young, and the tendency is the older you get, the more you look for people more your age or stuff. I began to almost entirely, I think I went through one phase where I don't think I can remember the last time I hired somebody over 30, I can't even remember. I can't remember. It's not like I'm opposed, it's just that I'm trying to find a young person because that brings reverse mentoring.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right.

James Emery White:

And the way this is working, people will say, well, how can somebody who is ... I'm 58. I've got 11 grandchildren. How am I connecting with 20s and 30s? It's so interesting. A lot of people feel like the answer is you got to dress in skinny jeans, you got to talk slang, and I see guys my age doing that in churches. To me it's repulsive. It's just so weird and it's repulsive to a 20 something too, and much more than they probably realize. Just be who you are and be natural. What they're hungry for is they're hungry for mentoring.

James Emery White:

They've got endless access to information and almost no access to wisdom. They've never been parented and they've never had a functional family. So, if you can be that father figure and a wisdom figure who is culturally literate and who is relevant, but who's bringing wisdom to bear and you're almost fathering them in a way they never were fathered, the attraction is just palpable. Like there's something, there's this wonderful dynamic, where here's this stage full of teens and 20 somethings, but then out walks this older mature person to tackle older, mature stuff because it's like ...

James Emery White:

I saw a tweet the other day, I wish I'd saved it. It was some 20 something guy who said, "I wish all 20 and 30 something pastors would quit talking about how to have the perfect marriage and raise perfect kids

until they've done it and certainly don't write a book about it." So, let me tell you how to parent and you've got a 10-year old, oh, please, please,

Carey Nieuwhof:

Please get to 20. See if you live.

James Emery White:

There's something about when, for example, Susan and I get up there and talk about marriage and a lot of times we'll team teach that and we're up there and we've been married 35 years. We can talk in a way that other people can't. I've got four children who all came to know Christ and who are all four have been in vocational ministry, all four of them. They're all in their 20s and 30s with children of their own. I can talk about parenting in light of all the seasons and as well as I can talk to young parents about what they're going through because I have 11 grandchildren.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, that's a lot of grandkids.

James Emery White:

I mean, you want to talk to me about twos? Let me talk to you about twos. How many twos you got? I had six in my house last night, you got nothing. So, it's a sweet time and I love working with young people. I love working with the young staff. By God's grace I'm able to bring to a younger demographic at this stage of my life while at the same time not missing the older demographic. We're younger than we ever have been before. We're growing as fast or faster as we ever have before. I love the challenge of the rise of the nuns. I love the evangelistic challenge. I love how now you can teach where you can reach unchurched people and disciple the already convinced with the same bullet. You couldn't do that 10, 15 years ago.

Carey Nieuwhof:

No, it was separate.

James Emery White:

Yeah and I love that. I love the technology challenge. I love grooming, and I'm going to love passing the baton on. I'm going to love to do that. I just want to ... I know I'm on my last best run and I realize it's the hat and I appreciate it and I'm thankful for it, and so I'm very excited. I love the writing I'm getting to do these days. I just love it. It's just so much fun.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, and you're prolific in your writing too. I want to ask you about your rhythms for that, but that's interesting. You mentioned passing the baton and I'm not going to ask you for a timeline or anything like that, but what are ... what's that?

James Emery White:

When I'm 70.

Carey Nieuwhof:

When you're 70?

James Emery White:

I'd like to go to 70. I think 70 or just 65.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I was going to ask you, how would you pick that figure? How would you know? What are the signs when you know, "All right, this is my time."

James Emery White:

Yeah, I think some of it you just need to predetermine because I don't know if I want to go by emotion. I'd like to go by submitting, and as I look at it now 70 seems like a good figure to pass on to somebody else. Maybe I could hang around doing some role, but I'd want to do it in a way that serves. The church will celebrate its 40th anniversary. It's just a lot about it that I think would be sweet. I'm not one of these who want to die in the pulpit. I'm not one of these I want to cling to it while my teeth are falling out. I want to finish well, pass it on and be a cheerleader for that next leader, and Susan does too, and just come find me, I'll be sitting in the nursery holding babies and having a blast, having an absolute blast.

James Emery White:

I would only go past that if it was just collectively seen as really strategic and it was just so clear and I just think that, that's my thinking now and have that leader on board two or three years before then and to where like maybe, okay, it starts off where he's doing 20% of the teaching. I'm doing 80 and the next year, 60-40 and then flip the 40-60, so that by the time I'm done, it's like who's he?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right, which is what we've done over the last five years at our church.

James Emery White:

You've done a good job.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, we're learning, we're going to see. You read a lot, you write a lot, and you write well. What amazes me about your writing is it's actually deep. It's thought through, obviously your scholarly background comes through, but you're also a real student of pop culture, research, et cetera.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Can you walk us through, because obviously you're leading this huge digital project. You are still in point leadership in your church. Plus you're popping out books every months, year or so. You got a new book coming out and they're real. They're not like, "Oh, here's this little sermon series I wrote, a fluffy little piece that turned into a book." They're like real books. Talk about how those disciplines are part of your life these days.

James Emery White:

I love to read. I think that helps. I was raised by ... My mom was a school teacher. My father was a PhD scientist research, but my mom could talk about a book, like it was something good to eat and we were disciplined. I was disciplined by whether or not we could go to the library. So, I had that love of reading given to me as a child, which was a priceless gift. I feel like one of my jobs as a pastor and as a professor and as a writer and the blogging that I do is, I am to be a student of culture.

James Emery White:

My fascination is the interplay of theology and culture. I'm still a professor of theology and culture at Gordon-Conwell and so that interplay fascinates me. So, I take that seriously as a discipline. So, I have time set aside every day where I am surveying cultural epicenters and news and cultural outlets that actually results in the ChurchAndCulture.org blog, ChurchAndCulture.org site where every day the foremost we think important. I think important new stories related to church and culture, faith and culture are posted. So, I own that personally. So, one of my disciplines is what it takes to say so abreast that you're able to present the foremost important stories of that day and you do that every day is a wonderful discipline for me. So, I do that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I'm a subscriber. I appreciate what you produce. When do you do that reading? Like take us a little bit down through that.

James Emery White:

I get up at 4:30 at the latest every day. Before I even do my workout, which essentially is 6:30, I've got two hours that I am doing an enormous amount of things, my quiet time, but also surveying various things and doing my new surveys and various things of that nature. I have writing days set aside and writing blocks all day Tuesday, and then Wednesday morning and Thursday morning are my writing blocks and they're completely protected and preserved at my home study.

James Emery White:

Another thing too that's helpful and I don't think you and I've talked about this. Everybody says when you're thinking about staff and stuff, hire your weaknesses. I think that there's a place to hire someone who has your same strengths. So for example, if I'm a writer and I need help to increase the capacity of my writing, I want to hire or surround myself, with a really good writer, someone who's an excellent editor and really a writer, who can actually help you expand your ability to do things.

James Emery White:

And I've been very blessed to be able to have one person in particular who allows me to increase my output at least two or three fold because of their writing skills, their editing skills, their research skills. So, I think that you need a mixture of both, but I mean I think you can ... like you may feel like, let's just say with you, let's say, and I don't know this is true. You might say, "Well, I need help with these administrative things. I'm not any good with administration." Okay, good. Get that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, that's me.

James Emery White:

But what if you also were to get an excellent podcaster?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yes.

James Emery White:

Not not so much to take your role, but to help you shape content and pick guests and write questions, so that you are able to like, "Gosh, I used to do one podcast a week, I can do three if I've got this being done for me." So, I think there's a place for that is-

Carey Nieuwhof:

How do you use your writer? How do you use that writer?

James Emery White:

Well, this one particular person is, what they do is that when I get finished with a writing project, whether it's a blog or a book, they take it and they do full editing for me and just go over it and just completely catch every grammatical error, make sure footnotes and notes are accurate, flush those out if all I've got to link, polish up various things. In fact, every blog that I send out goes through two people after me, and both of them give it a careful reading, make all the adjustments that need to be made and so I can write it, but I'm not having to spend the time to painstakingly go over it for grammatical errors, misspellings, did this link actually work? So, I've got a team of people that do that and help me with that. I do all the writing. I don't have ghost writers, but-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Me too.

James Emery White:

I have people that just, I don't have to do all the work that's involved in producing a book or a blog.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right.

James Emery White:

I just mean, it feels right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Do you utilize that team for messages as well?

James Emery White:

No.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay. That's just your writing.

James Emery White:

I don't use any services for messages. I don't use anything from messages. That is raw. Here's what I do, I have a team that does so or a person that does, is that when I write my talk and then I go through it orally before I give it, and I'm making all of like things that I want to say differently as I go through it orally. So, my manuscripts are very marked up, things crossed out, changed, and so when I get done having delivered it, I turn that file over to someone who then takes all those changes, launch them back in and creates a fresh, clean document that is then put on the Church and Culture site to serve others. So, it is all completely done and also reflects the changes in the inflections that were made as it was presented live.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, this is interesting. You said you spend, did I get this right? All day Tuesday, all day Wednesday and most of Thursday.

James Emery White:

No, all day Monday I'm in the office. All day Tuesday I'm writing. Wednesday morning writing, Wednesday afternoon office, Thursday morning writing, Thursday afternoon office. Fridays off.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow.

James Emery White:

That's my schedule.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You lead a very large church with that kind of schedule. How do you stay out of the weeds?

James Emery White:

There's a couple of things that ... I mean I've got a lot of leadership weaknesses, but one of them is not the failure to delegate. I am not a micromanager. I am not a micromanager. So, staff that thrive not being micromanaged, do really well here. If somebody were to show up at my door every morning and say, "Hey, give me the five things I'm supposed to do today." I mean, shoot me now. I want to bring on people who intuitively know what to do and they only come to you when they need coaching or help pass something over to think through something. Also we're very, very stripped down. We're not this heavy kind of hierarchy of order. It's a flat structure. It's just a really flat. So, even when key decisions are made, we don't have a standing leadership team.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Really. Wow.

James Emery White:

The way it works is that every major decision or key decisions needs to be made, and here's kind of our mantra. Let's get the right people around the table to make this decision. Who are the right people, and it changes. Now, there might be the usual suspects, but it's like whatever the decision is, let's get the

right people around the table, and then let's have that discussion and then let's hash it out, and this is the decision making body. This is it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's cool.

James Emery White:

So, it works really well for us. So very stripped down structure. Vast majority of our people don't even have job titles. They have areas of responsibility but not titles, and it's just very, very organic, kind of more Apolis than Presbyterian.

Carey Nieuwhof:

How many direct reports do you have or do you think about it that way?

James Emery White:

To a degree I have to, but I would, I mean, not many. Not many. I really don't.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You're not in a lot of meetings every week?

James Emery White:

Oh no. Oh no, no. The meetings that I'm involved in are strategic decision making kind of gatherings. There's a lot of meetings that go on, but I'm not invited. I mean, I could show if I wanted to and if they knew I wanted to be there, they'd love to have me there. But I trust these people. They're sharp. They got the mission down. They know the vision and values. It comes back to me after their work. I mean, it's kind of like for potential veto. So, I'm kept abreast of everything. Most of my leadership is on keeping abreast of everything and I'm getting involved where and when needed.

Carey Nieuwhof:

How do you stay abreast?

James Emery White:

Crunch a lot of emails, managed by walking around. I stick my head in a lot of offices every day. I'll just, "How you doing, anything I need to know?" I can take a walk through the buildings and be back in an hour and done like a week's worth of leadership and dealt with a lot of issues because I don't tend to be wordy. People learn not to be wordy around me. I get a long email. I just send it right back and I say, "Look, I don't have time to read this. Either stick your head in the door or shrink it, I don't have time to read this." So, they all know that when my door's open, anybody can stick their head in and I'm just immediately, we can deal with whatever they want. I might see 20 people in an hour that way. So, that's another good thing about separating my writing time at home from here is that when I'm here, I'm here. I am totally full work.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You're not trying to hide out.

James Emery White:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, this has been rich, man and went in so many different places than I thought it might. It's been good. Anything else you want to share with leaders, Jim, before we wrap this one up? It will be part two and many more. I'm sure.

James Emery White:

Well, if you'll allow me, because I care about it so much, I'd love a shameless plug for the new book and I took pride.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, please.

James Emery White:

I'll tell you why. I have written a lot of books and this is one that ... years ago I wrote a little book called A Search for the Spiritual, that was totally designed for the non-Christian to read. God blessed that book enormously and I'm so grateful for it, but it's dated. It got very dated and the questions have changed, and the issues have changed. So, one of the things that I wanted to do was to once again write a book that's explicitly written to and for a non-Christian so that Christian could give it to a non-Christian and it would be written sensitively and winsomely and compellingly just for them, and that churches could use it to give to non-Christians and can just be this huge evangelistic tool.

James Emery White:

Lee Strobel, has lent his support to it. I wanted to bring C.S. Lewis into it as a traveling companion because it's audacious to say you're going to update Mere Christianity, but that was the kind of the go to book. How could you kind of have that as part of the goal, but obviously realizing you can't tie his shoes?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right.

James Emery White:

So, the C.S. Lewis Foundation gave me permission to use Lewis more than any other book. So, I'm able to bring him along as a traveling companion. So, it's almost like you're getting Mere Christianity but totally updated dealing with all the issues of the day. Astrophysics, LGBTQ issues, judgmentalism and tolerance, hypocrisy, neo-atheism, the character of God, all the issues that are fresh for this day. So, I am praying Carey, that this is a book that will be used by Christians for their non-Christian friends and family and coworkers and neighbors.

James Emery White:

It is a selfless,a plug as I could imagine making for any book because it's just purely to reach people for Jesus. So, I need that kind of book as a pastor. Almost all the books out there are either apologetics for Christians or telling Christians how to talk to non-Christians, but this is a book for-

Carey Nieuwhof:

This goes direct.

James Emery White:

And Baker was even so good with me about like, okay, how are we going to design the cover? How are you going to do plugs? Because you can't even put blurbs on there.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right, another Christian saying what a great book.

James Emery White:

And even Lee Strobel, him as a former atheist, award winning reporter talking about how he wished this book had been around when he was an atheist. That was the only blurb that we even allowed. So, everything about it was designed for non-Christian.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, you know what I noticed about it? It is a great book and I'm glad you mentioned it. We just ended up in so many different fields. I never really got into it, but you have pictures of it, which is ... Tell me about that.

James Emery White:

Yeah, well, I mean, one of the things that we did was like a survey of what are people's top questions about Jesus, like a non-Christian. You know one of the number one was, "What did he look like?"

Carey Nieuwhof:

Seriously?

James Emery White:

What did he look like? So, in that chapter we actually show, here's what Jesus may looked like based on reproductions and various other things, and we had the special permission for that. I mean, there's some of the coolest visuals and pictures in this book that are designed with the questions and interests of a non-Christian. So yeah, the pictures are used all throughout it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You open it with the story of C.S. Lewis's conversion to Christianity from atheism, right?

James Emery White:

Yeah, and I kind of introduced him as that. Listen, here's going to be the third person on this journey that we're taking, and I tell them that ... I describe Lewis in a way that most people don't, kind of the side of Lewis that would make him not even accepted at the evangelical schools that house his books. He was an earthy guy and a very earthy guy, but I loved it. I love it, and I even told some stories that I had been told while I was studying at Oxford from people who knew Lewis and that-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, you got to give us one of those stories now, can't just leave us hanging.

James Emery White:

Well, I would do my writing in The Eagle and Child pub in the afternoons and was doing some studies in the morning and just got to know the people because I was a regular there and they kind of asked me different things. I would ask them questions and they would say that, they said, "Well, you know that the inklings met in the morning a lot of times and Lewis would start drinking then and he would come to class with alcohol on his breath." They said, "Sometimes a bit of a buzz, not strong, just he'd been at the pub and his coat would have burn holes in the pockets because he kept putting his pipe in while it was ... actively smoking it, put it in, the ashes would burn through, so his coat had these burn pockets in them."

James Emery White:

He was kind of a louder, outspoken guy, kind of outgoing and kind of earthy and kind of the opposite of Tolkien, who was more reserved and prim and proper. Lewis was more of the robust Irish guy. So, it was just fun to hear those little things. I introduced him a little bit and in a way that as I'm writing to people who aren't Christians, I said, "You know, I don't know what your stereotype of a Christian is, but I think you would have liked this guy."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Absolutely. It's so funny how he gets so buttoned down, right? In our faith and so worried about that stuff. But yeah, Lord of the Rings and Chronicles of Narnia meet together where you were as well. Well, Jim, people are going to want to connect with you online. So, tell us where they can find you and where they can find your church to watch this amazing transformation.

James Emery White:

Well, all this stuff related to blogs and books and resources and messages and downloads and all that, it's all at ChurchAndCulture.org.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right.

James Emery White:

Then the church's website is Mecklenburg.org. That's M-E-C-K-L-E-N-B-U-R-G.org and again, but hold onto your seat with that one because we're in the midst of a vertical mapping of our website that'll debut over the next few months, so you're seeing some other iteration, but yep.

Carey Nieuwhof:

The book once more, it's available everywhere, right?

James Emery White:

Yup, and it's called Christianity for People Who Aren't Christians.

Carey Nieuwhof:

James Emery White. Thank you so much. It's been just a joy once again.

James Emery White:

Thanks for having me.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Boy, that's a lot to think about and process and it's so helpful. Of course, we have show notes so you can head on over to CareyNieuwhof.com/Episode322. Remember to stay tuned for this new segment that we're doing called What I'm Thinking About. I'm talking about why some of us, myself included, can be a little bit controlling sometimes and one of the antidotes to that, it's actually clarity of all things. So, I am going to speak about that in a few minutes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

We got a fresh episode coming up real soon. I want to give you a preview of it. It is Josh Gagnon who's coming up next on the podcast. He'll be here next Tuesday, and we talk about how to chase your dreams even after you've been disappointed, keeping hope alive and how to know whether to finally give up on your dream. Here's an excerpt from that conversation.

Josh Gagnon:

I've often said, and I don't know if you'll agree with this, this is pretty edgy. For me I would've quit ministry several, several times and people ask, "Well, why haven't you quit?" You want to know the honest answer? The honest answer is this, outside of like, I feel like God's calling me to do it and this, that and the other thing. The honest answer, why I haven't quit ministry is cause the pain of not doing it would hurt worse than the pain while doing it. That's why I haven't quit ministry. I know that if I quit ministry, I would sit there and feel so much pain knowing that I wasn't doing what I was created to do and that pain would be worse than the pain of enduring the trials and the frustrations of staying inside of what God has called me to do.

Josh Gagnon:

So, I know a lot of the listeners are just thinking, "That's it, man, because I would've quit." And if I were to say, "Why haven't you quit?" They're going to say, "Oh, it would just be too painful. It's painful here but not as painful."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Subscribers, you get that absolutely free and that one's coming up on Thursday actually. We try to pump out six a month and so we're helping you out with that one. Hey, now as we get to What I'm Thinking About, I want to remind you to head on over and check out Pro Media Fire. They help so many churches with their media needs at less than the cost of hiring your own team. So, to get 10% off plans for life, go to ProMediaFire.com/Carey and make sure you don't miss out on ReThinkLeadership.com use the coupon code RL20CAREY. RL20CAREY at ReThinkLeadership.com when you check out.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, what am I thinking about these days? Well, control and clarity. So, I have a tendency to be a little bit of a control freak and being a control freak is honestly, it's a cap on your leadership because if you think about it, if everything has to pass by you, right? Which is the tendency for a lot of leaders, you can only lead something that is so big, it's always going to be as small as your reach. The vast majority of

churches are small, 85% are 200 or less. Vast majority of businesses, 96% never pass the million-dollar mark in revenue, and only 2% of churches ever scale past 1,000 people.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So why is that? Well, there's a lot of reasons, but honestly one of them, believe it or not is clarity. Clarity, and I've found as I've led through different levels of my own personal leadership that often one of the reasons I would delegate something and then reach back in and grab control again is because I wasn't clear about. So let's say for example, you launch a second location, whether that's for a church or a restaurant, whatever you're leading, you go into the restaurant, you're the owner, you're the founder, you go to the church, you're the senior pastor and you're like, "Wait, that's not how we do it," and you get all mad and then you fire the general manager, fire the campus pastor, you take it back again and you're like, "Well, I've got to lead this thing myself."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, what is that? What is that? Often it's a lack of clarity. See, as a leader in my mind, the vision is crystal clear. I know exactly what we're doing, why we're doing it, how we're doing it. I know the strategy, but often I fail to make that clear to other people. I've found at different points in my leadership, I've had to step back and go, you know what? That wasn't their fault. It's not their fault that guest services isn't up to snuff. It's not their fault that, that isn't the right way to do it. It's my fault because I didn't communicate it. As a leader, I always want to move on to like shiny new things. But one of my fundamental roles as a leader is to clarify the vision.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So how do you do that? Well, first of all, if you don't have a written down, write it down. But then when you have it written down, make sure you repeat it, repeat it, teach it, teach it in new ways, make sure everybody owns it. One really good reality check and it's always so humbling when I do this is just, not in a mean way, but just around the table. Even with your senior team say, "Hey, let's just refocus on the vision. How would you guys describe our vision?" Just see what they have to say.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Like when top business coaches do this, they go around to major Fortune 500 companies and ask the senior leaders, what's the mission of this company? It's shocking often how few people can recite it and you may find the same thing and then you realize, you know what? We have a deficit. Same with your values. What are some of the values of our company? What strategy of our company? If you've got different pictures around the senior leadership table, or if most people have no idea what it is, then that's one of your problems.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, if you find yourself reaching back into the organization and reclaiming control, ask yourself, is this a clarity problem? Because often it is. Well listen, I hope you're enjoying this new segment. If you are, let me know about it. Okay? Send us a note, Carey@CareyNieuwhof.com and by the way, that website CareyNieuwhof.com is where everything happens. I send out an email to about 56,000 leaders almost on a daily basis. It's very short, often less than a hundred words, and it's got a link to a resource I think you'll find valuable where I try to tackle some of the leadership problems we all face.

Carey Nieuwhof:

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So, if you would like to receive an email from me, head on over to careynieuwhof.com, subscribe now and I'd love to welcome you into that part of the family. In the meantime, we're back soon with a fresh episode 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.