

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 325 of the podcast, my name is Carey Nieuwhof, and I hope our time together today helps you lead like never before. Today's podcast is brought to you by the Leaders in Living Room podcast and a brand new initiative called The Leader's Circle, so stay tuned for that. My guest today is Susan Steinbrecher, and this was a fascinating conversation. Do you know, believe it or not, most companies and I would say churches are no exception to this if you work at a church, work is a place where people spend 25 to 40% of their work week dealing with disputes, disagreements, and unresolved conflict. Yeah, up to almost half their time at work dealing with just stuff that isn't work.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And so we have a fascinating conversation about how to lead change, how to deal with conflict at work and how to increase team engagement, I think you're absolutely going to love. I wrote a book on change, I had to tell you, I learned a lot in this interview. Susan is a business consultant, professional speaker, licensed mediator and she's president and CEO of Steinbrecher and Associates. She's written a number of bestselling books, she's consulted with some of the top companies in the world and she's a regular contributor to Inc.com, and her work has been featured on MSNBC, The New York Times, Fortune Small Business, Business Insider, Entrepreneur.com, Huffington Post and CNNMoney.com.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So I'm super excited to have Susan on the podcast. Hey, I don't know where you are today, but I just want to say I am so glad that you tuned in, thanks for taking us on your run, on your commute, on I don't know, maybe your bike ride. Anybody bike riding at this time here? I just kind of wish I was. Usually in March, I can get out once or twice and I took up running this winter, so that's really, really good for like listening to podcasts and also good for my body.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So whether you're cooking dinner or whatever you're doing, I just want to say, it's a joy to have you along for the journey. And I wonder what podcasts you are listening to, one that I have really enjoyed is Leaders in Living Rooms. So I've gotten to know Sean Morgan, the host of that podcast personally, he's had me on as a guest, but his heartbeat is to bring you conversations that are open, honest and transparent. And Sean is I think the best connected least well-known leader in the church in America. Sean creates some amazing conversations with top leaders.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So for example, here's just a partial list of some of the people he's had on Leaders in Living Rooms. He's had Jud Wilhite from Central Church in Vegas, Brady Boyd, Aaron Brockett, David Kinnaman, Kenton Beshore and even had me. And if you enjoy this podcast, I think you're going to love Leaders in Living Rooms, so you can find it on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, anywhere you want. We also have it in the show notes or go to CDFcapital.org/Leaders-In-Living-Rooms. And leaders, I'm so excited this day is here,

because we are launching something brand new, a brand new resource for leaders called The Leader's Circle. You can learn about it at [TheLeadersCircle.live](#), we have spent about a year putting this together and it's all about not leading alone and starting to lead together.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So I love the fact that you're a podcast listener, but I bet you've sat there some times and thought, "I really wish I could ask Carey a question." Inside The Leader's Circle, you can. Here's what you get inside The Leader's Circle, you get a community of other high-capacity leaders, and you get done-for-you content, and you get access to me and done-for-you leadership development. Here's how it works, so we get millions of people who access my content every year but inside The Leader's Circle, I will be doing a live monthly ask me anything call. We also have a private forum that isn't controlled by an algorithm where you can post your questions, I'll be active in the forum but so will many other high-capacity leaders, so you finally get a tribe that you can talk to about what you're trying to solve in leadership.

Carey Nieuwhof:

In addition, you get done-for-you staff meetings, so every month I'll give you a free done-for-you 15 to 20-minute training video on a key leadership subject that you can use to train your team. It also comes with a printable meeting agenda, a team application guide to help your team apply what they've learned, and it's literally plug and play done-for-you, you don't have to think about it. Plus, it comes with a backgrounder, so I give you a slightly longer video that you can watch or listen to, it also comes in audio format where I explained the issue behind the staff training so that you can gain mastery over the issue, so that's about a 30 to 40 minute video.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Now, the reality is you're like, "I don't have time to watch a video." Great, comes in audio format and I'll also give you the transcript, so if you'd prefer not to play me, your staff meeting is done-for-you, you can use all my prep done-for-you, finished, ready to go, staff meeting is done-for-you every month. You also get access to an incredible tribe of leaders and it's curated, it's not overwhelming, the last thing you need is a mountain of new content. The Leader's Circle is the opposite, it's a few carefully sculpted pieces of content each month that will help you master the challenges of leadership and access to a tribe and to me to help you do it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

If you're interested, registration is open for a very short window of time and you can learn more at [TheLeadersCircle.live](#), I'd love to have you check that out. Well, with all that said, let us jump into my conversation with Susan Steinbrecher. Susan, welcome to the podcast.

Susan Steinbrecher:

Thank you, I'm excited to be with you today.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, it's great to meet you, great to have you, and you've been working in the corporate world for a while now, and that's the reality about leadership. It's very few of us are truly solo, we're all in teams, we all have challenges. So from your perspective in the corporate world, what are some of the just

perennial challenges? Like you will be in business forever because of these issues, what do you keep running into in the corporate world?

Susan Steinbrecher:

Well, there's probably several things but probably one of the first one that popped up when you asked that question is change. So we've been in business 28 years and I'd like to say there was a period of time within the 28 that people weren't going through some kind of massive change, but the truth is it's been pretty consistent. And along with that is I always like to look at change in two ways, there's the emotional side of change or the logical side of change. And a lot of business leaders approach change in more of that. Well, it's just good for the business so you need to get on board, and they're not forgetting that people emotionally go through all kinds of trauma often when change occurs because we fear the unknown, so that's certainly one.

Susan Steinbrecher:

Another is just conflict in the workplace, whether that's peer to peer or not being able to get aligned or whether you have a boss and employee not getting along to the level that they need to be, so that's certainly one as well. And I'm also seeing an increased trend of employee disengagement, so they're not so motivated. They'll come in and they'll be present and they'll comply because they don't want to lose the job, but are they really emotionally committed and motivated to work the very best and I'm seeing a disconnect there and I think all the statistics and research is bearing that out as well right now.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, we're going to spend a lot of time on the second issue but I wouldn't mind if you don't mind drilling down on the first and the third too because I think those are huge issues for almost every leader, whether in your church, business community, organizations, things are always changing. You said something really interesting, you said, "It's an emotional and also a logical thing." Where have you seen the pitfalls when it comes to leading change? Do people do leaders by nature default to the logical thing like it's just good for the business?

Susan Steinbrecher:

Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Or what are some of the pitfalls you see?

Susan Steinbrecher:

Yeah, that's the pitfall I see, is they want to present the business case and the argument as to why this change is so much better for them, for the business, for the company, for whatever. And that's good and you do need to do that, but that's not really the first step. The first step is recognizing that you have this whole human being sitting there, that is sitting there going, "Oh my gosh, what does this mean for me? What if I lose my job?" They go down that whole path, and so I find businesses often do an amazing job in the due diligence on the business acumen, due diligence part where, why it all financially might make sense to do this?

Susan Steinbrecher:

But again, not appealing to the human tendency there, so I have a model I use called SARA, and it's an acronym. So S stands for sadness, A for anger, R for resistance, and it's just kind of keeps going. So if you address the emotional side first, you're going to move that person quicker to the change that you're trying to get done. And it's when we ignore that side and take the stance of, "Oh, listen, this is just the way it is and you need to get it on board," that doesn't typically work, often people create even more resistance because of that.

Susan Steinbrecher:

And then they're even more disengaged because they're more in fear because they're not being heard, and that is another common thing I'm hearing today, is people really want to be heard today and I think at a pretty extreme level.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, talk about the sadness, because I think that's true, like I'm used to being the leader and the good news about that is you always get to engineer the change, right?

Susan Steinbrecher:

Right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But sometimes when you're a follower, when you're somebody who's part of an organization and you didn't make the decision, I can see how there's almost immediately a sadness. So for example, they're changing, I'm going to give you a really, like the most trivial example you can imagine. But they're changing our garbage collection in my neighborhood to every other week and I'm like, "Well, you're not billing me my taxes every other week, like why are you doing that? It's a reduction of service for the same price and other reasons behind it, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera." But yeah, my first emotion was like a little bit of sadness and then not sadness, but just like, "Whoa, well, what does this mean? Does it mean my garage is going to stink in July? You know, when you don't come and pick up my garbage right away, what is that?" So how does a leader navigate that?

Susan Steinbrecher:

So great question, and on the sadness aspect of it it's the loss, it's the loss of what's known, it's the loss of the comfort. And the truth is our brain is not wired for change and it loves the path of least resistance, it loves comfort, and it's a security issue. And so when change gets introduced and the person may go, "Well, now I'm not going to get to work with my friend."

Susan Steinbrecher:

And we know from Gallup's work that what they call their Q12, one of those questions is, "Do I have a best friend at work?" And those that can say, "I have a best friend at work," often, along with other factors, of course, are one of the more motivated, engaged employees. So now, all of a sudden, "I may not get to work with a person I wanted to work with," or, "My boss is changing," or, "My job's changing." And the unknown creates a lot of emotion, and in some cases that shows up in the sadness to your point, or anger or resistance.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, yeah. I think that's a really good point because as a leader you tend to process change on the meta level, but as a participant you're like, "Well, that means we're not going to be in the same department anymore." Like it's really processed at a different level, so what do you advise leaders to do? Like what do you do when you're leading change in that context?

Susan Steinbrecher:

The first is to recognize that, that is going on and we might all like to believe that well, this is a business decision and you should just get it, but that is really not what's going to happen first and foremost. They'll get there eventually if you handle it well. So the first thing I always share with leaders is listen, listen, listen. And I mean listen mindfully and with full presence, and then empathetic responding, and then ask questions. So for example, it would be, "Listen, I can see this is really a challenge for you, do you mind sharing more about that? I really want to understand." And then that gives the person that invitation to be heard and then naturally the empathy is, "I see that, I appreciate that that's difficult for you."

Susan Steinbrecher:

Then move it with a question by saying something like, "What is one step that you can take that would make this easier for you? What is one thing you need to do? And where, and how can I support you?" And often, they just need the space to vent and to express their concern. And the manager that really listens and mirrors that back, they'll typically move forward much faster than of again, we have that often that response of, "Well, you need to get on board because this is the direction our company's going." That doesn't usually work.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's funny how that, actually does spiral people into negativism. You're taking me back to my first days of leadership when I led three little churches through a rapid change including selling centuries, old buildings, amalgamation, the whole deal. And I mean that's about as big a change as you get in an organization, we're going to sell, we're going to amalgamate, we're going to merge, we're going to do all this. And I remember standing at congregational meetings back when we had them and people were just screaming. And I don't know why but I just didn't respond, I just kind of let them talk, you just kind of listen. Any advice for leaders who have like really upset people who want to barge into your office or overtake a town hall meeting, how do you handle that stuff?

Susan Steinbrecher:

Yeah. Well, something at a public town hall meeting where you now have this sort of dysfunctional behavior showing up in front of other people, the more that you can express empathy to the individual and then also say, because that starts to calm people down, it neutralizes negative emotion. Then you can say to the person, "I hear you and I really want to learn more, why don't you and I take this offline after the meeting? Because I really do want to come to understand what's happening in your world." And then move off, you're going to have to, and often that will be enough, often. And if not, then you try it again, right? You try it again.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And you call security. No, kidding.

Susan Steinbrecher:

Yeah, I mean if it gets really bad, then you do. But in most cases in a business setting, they do want their jobs so there's usually like some protocol there where they won't overly misbehave, I should say.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, in a volunteer setting they actually want your job, it's like, "You should go." So that can be different, it's a different dynamic. But no, I think that's really good and I'm driving at that because I realized that everything in me wanted to defend myself and logically process it. And I kind of realized early on and that's a mistake, isn't it, Susan?

Susan Steinbrecher:

Very much. And in fact, just a really quick story, an example around that. I remember, this is years and years ago, early into having my business and we're celebrating our 28th year this year, which was shocking to me.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Congrats.

Susan Steinbrecher:

Thank you. But this was one of those situations where, okay, I'm trying to win over the client, the decision makers are in the back of the room, they hire me to teach a class called Communicating Effectively with Others, and I'm up there and we're in the very beginning of this four-hour class. I mean, we're literally just going around the room and doing introductions and this man jumps up, literally, physically jumps up and starts screaming at the top of his lung in front of everybody and says, "This is BS, I don't want to be here, nobody here wants to be here and the people who should be here are my bosses and he's this, and guess what? I'm having trauma at home and my wife beat me up last night."

Susan Steinbrecher:

And he proceeds to roll up his sleeves and he's literally black and blue, and I'm like, "Oh my gosh, this is a great way to start this workshop, this is really, wow." So I said to him and I said, "First of all, wow, I am so sorry that that happened to you last night and thank you for having all of that situation happen and you still chose to be here today. So let me just say that my commitment to you is the skills you're going to learn today are going to help you at work. But probably right now, more importantly, help you at home."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, wow.

Susan Steinbrecher:

And he shut up completely, I mean he didn't know what to say back and he's just sat right down and everybody looked at me. So luckily-

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's great.

Susan Steinbrecher:

... I had emotional composure in the moment to realize all this person needs is to be heard.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow.

Susan Steinbrecher:

And he was fine after that. So it was just crazy but that's one of those moments where public setting, what do you do? You don't defend, it's the worst thing you can do because that's what they expect you to do. Instead, you move in with compassion and empathy and that will usually neutralize the negative emotion.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I want to and this may be different in a paid employment situation, but having led in a volunteer organization for years with staff, but I mean most of the dynamics are not with the staff, you've got a dozen staff and 1500 people, it's a different ratio. And feel free to disagree, but don't take the statistic as literal, it's just a gut feeling. But I've always said for years, 95% of the conflict in the church has nothing to do with the church, and it made me think about that guy who just had probably one of the most horrible nights of his life and his wife's life, the night before. Can you comment on that? Do you think that's true that often people just bring in the stuff in their life and they dump it at work? Or they dump it in an organization?

Susan Steinbrecher:

Yeah, I absolutely think that's true and I think that's where the more that leaders understand that you have a whole human being coming to work with all the drama, all the back background, all the issues at home and whatever issues might even be at work. And we used to always say, "Well, you know what? You need to leave home at home, and come to work and leave that behind you." Yeah, it's laughable, it's truly laughable.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I'd doesn't work, does it?

Susan Steinbrecher:

Good luck with that, it won't work that way, they are going to bring whatever's going home to work. So the more that we can again, have that empathy, have that space, recognize, wow, this reaction feels a bit out of character, or this reaction feels an extreme sort of response to this situation, then there's for sure something else going on here.

Susan Steinbrecher:

And the more that you can show interest in wanting to understand what's happening with that full present listening, then the more they will more than likely say, "Hey, just thank you for listening today, I know I was..." Then they start apologizing and stepping back, and really that's a good position to be in because they recognize that you held the space for them when they needed it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Is that one of the changes we've seen in the workplace over the last 28 years? Is that more of that soft skill is needed now than perhaps in the '90s or the 2000s?

Susan Steinbrecher:

Yeah, absolutely. I think the management sort of model in the '70s and the '80s was very much command and control and we'll see pieces of that still occurs out there. But what we're finding is because of the diversity of the workplace, the multicultural aspect that we have today, we're a global society, there's a lot of leaders managing global teams, you have different opinion, different languages, all that's going on, and so it's really going to take... And especially generations, so Generation X sort of started at Y, the Millennials are definitely there and Z, the digital natives coming into the workforce now, they're going to demand more of that style, they're not going to really tolerate the command and control.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, which is interesting. How do you prepare yourself as a boss, as an employer, as a leader to handle? Because you know, if you grew up in that generation and you remember command and control, like what are some good guidances as to where the line between personal and corporate is? If you follow what I'm saying.

Susan Steinbrecher:

Yeah, I think so. I think first of all, what you're bringing up is really a key point, so in our executive coaching, for example, we're working with a leader. Often we were asked to work with the leader because they're drilling in their career, they were very successful at one point. And now the old command and control aspect or the old way of managing is no longer working, and that's difficult. So when I work with a client like that, I always believe that people don't jump out of bed with the intention to disappoint, and there might be a couple exceptions to that of course, but for the most part, people try to get it right, they just know what they know, and they're an autopilot with the skills that they have, even those kinds of managers.

Susan Steinbrecher:

So meeting with them and making sure that their positive self-regard and esteem is maintained and that I say to them, "Listen, you're doing all that you know how to do, you're hitting a wall. My job is to help you understand why you show up the way you show up, because that's a big part of our coaching practice, it's getting underneath the hood to understand that, and then to share with you a different toolkit."

Susan Steinbrecher:

So the old manager toolkit was all about planning, organizing, directing, controlling, which of course you still need those skills. But when you get to a point where you're starting to manage larger and larger groups, you shift into what I would call a leadership toolkit, and that's all about inspiring, motivating, negotiating and persuading and influencing. And that core denominator of all of those is people and relationship, so getting them to understand that and then helping them with the skills for that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

How easy is that to learn those new skills? Because from the leaders I work with, it's not easy. Yes, I hear this all the time, I get almost every day Susan, I get some kind of note or comment on social from a younger leader who's frustrated by an older leader's management style, and just like they're not listening, they're not empathetic, they don't want to change, and they're the problem in the organization. So you know, speak to those leaders to maybe realize, "I don't like this conversation because it feels a little bit too close to home." How would they go about learning that new, a different approach? You said it's not easy, I agree.

Susan Steinbrecher:

No, it's not easy because again, you're back to change and change isn't easy.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right.

Susan Steinbrecher:

So the first thing I do is find the, "What's in it for them to make the change?" I have to believe, and I've been at least accurate with that with all my clients, that that behavior is not just reserved for work, this is also the behavior at home. And often when you talk to them about how are their relationships at home, relationships with their kids, their significant other or partner in their life, then it all comes out, "Well, it kind of had the same problem, my son and I are not on the same page," or whatever that is. And then so if you can get to their, "What's in it for me?" And they see the pain point, then the motivation is higher to learn and change.

Susan Steinbrecher:

And then I map out some plans, some strategies and goals and have them practice, even if I role play it with them, like we practice active listening, we practice asking questions versus telling, we practice empathetic responding. And at first it might feel weird and awkward or even be a manipulative because they don't feel like authentic, but in order to learn any new skill, you have to practice, that you don't learn anything without practice, so getting them to show up differently. First of all, had the motivation to do it and then secondly, help them with the skill.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I feel like I've spent years trying to learn how to listen as a communicator. What are some keys to really listening well in your view?

Susan Steinbrecher:

Yeah, I think it's that full presence, mindful listening, it's what I like to call that, where you're really 100% engaged, you're fully present, you're not multitasking, you're not looking at your phone at the same time, you're moved away from the computer, or if you're sitting behind a computer and you're talking to an employee, get away from that, sit side-by-side or find a location where it's more relaxed environment, less power positioning going on, from an office go to lunch with a person or coffee or something like that.

Susan Steinbrecher:

And then it is reflectively listening back what you heard, so what I'm hearing you say is A, B, and C. It's not about agreeing or disagreeing it's about reflecting back what you heard. And then when they come forward but, "Yes, that's right." Or, "No, that's not right." "Okay, I do want to hear, I do want to understand, do you mind sharing with that again with me?" And so that's one of the things that we talk about.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Somehow, all of this has to be linked to employee engagement at work too, right? If you're not being well-led, well-managed. You talked about the rising trend in employee disengagement, I think there's that fairly well often quoted Gallup stat, that 70% of American employees are disengaged at work. What are you seeing there, Susan?

Susan Steinbrecher:

I would agree, I see a lot of that going on, and in some cases that the disengagement is due to a boss situation or it might be, "I'm not so sure, I like the top leadership of this company." Or, "I'm not so sure, I like what this company stands for." In different generation, we'll approach that differently as well, that's a whole another kind of conversation if you will. But I also look at that and say sometimes the disengagement might have to do with again, relationships at work or, "I feel like I'm not being valued, appreciated, cared about, listened to, empathized with, empowered, the kinds of things where I'm not trusted to do the right job, someone's looking over my shoulder."

Susan Steinbrecher:

So the more that a leader can come to understand the why's behind the behavior, the disengagement, the better. So for example in my book, Meaningful Alignment, as well as probably a thousand different classes and speeches that I've given, I've asked people to think about the best boss they've ever had, just reflect on your career, whatever. Think about that individual and now tell me what were the behaviors? What did they say and do that made you think of that person? And normally what I scan the audience, it's within 15 seconds.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I know.

Susan Steinbrecher:

And the list is always the same. This boss cared-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Now, tell me the list, give me the list, that's great.

Susan Steinbrecher:

... cared about me, listened to me, empowered me, trusted me, gave me opportunity. And then I challenge it by saying, "Well, what I don't see on the list is great P&L management, know how to run a bit budget." They laugh, right? And then I'll say, "But I'm going to guess some of those leaders were actually pretty good at that, is that true?" And I get a lot of, "Yes." "Well, then why didn't you think of it?" I purposely left the question wide open. "Tell me about your best boss, what were the behaviors?"

And then I go, "Oh, wow, that's interesting." And then when I say, "Now tell me how long ago you worked for this person." And I hear 20 years ago, 30 years ago, 10 years ago.

Susan Steinbrecher:

In 15 seconds within, they thought of that individual, and why is that? It's because of how that leader made them feel and often believed in them at a time when they might not have even believed in themselves, so it's really powerful and this is where you touch that cord of what really matters. And of course, part of what I'm sharing in that message is, what kind of legacy are you trying to lead here? If we're all going to work our 52,800 whatever the current status is, we're actually burn out for most working. What are we doing? I mean, what is this all about? What are we doing this for?

Susan Steinbrecher:

So you can collect a check, but most of us want to create some kind of meaning in people's lives or want to make a difference. And so here's your perfect platform as a leader to do that, and they like to be on that list, and if somebody thought about the best boss, their name comes up.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I love that, that's something I haven't seen a lot about particularly over the last 10 or 15 years. I had an episode where I burned out in my late thirties, early forties and sort of came back from that and thought, "Okay, I've got to rethink a lot of this." And part of it is I want this to be to the extent that, "I'm your employer, I want this to be the best job you ever had, and I realize you're probably not going to work here forever."

Carey Nieuwhof:

And I'm learning a lot of those soft skills. It's like listen, care about the whole person, you bring the whole person to work, shared values, shared vision, listen for input not just direction, all those things. What keeps a leader? Because you're right, we all want to be that boss, and yet sometimes we get so driven on growth, so driven on the P&L, so driven on organizational objectives, so what keeps leaders from doing that? From just being that kind of a person?

Susan Steinbrecher:

I think more times than not, it's a lot of pressure and a lot of responsibility and stress because that creates stress and so then we get very tactical. It's all about getting the to-do list, let's get people to move something, they're feeling the pressure from their boss often, or they're not able to buffer sometimes effectively the messages they might be getting above, and buffer that between what they actually say to their employees.

Susan Steinbrecher:

And that's what they really have to build the skill in, because they can always say, "Work with what your center of influence and what you can control, and you've got to let go of what you can't control." So you may not be able to control what your boss does, your boss's boss does or whatever it does, but you can buffer and filter a message and say it the right way to your people even if it wasn't said to you the right way. So I think those are all the things that are going on right now.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's really good, so just to make... because this has been a really helpful and it's conversation that's really resonating with me, Susan, so I think it's really helpful and I think it's very needed in so many spheres of leadership. But let's break it down to the hyper-practical. So think about all of us who are responsible for leading others, what are one, two, or even three practices we could start implementing now that would help start to make that shift and make people engage deeper? Because I think you're right, if you deal with those soft issues, you go a long way to solving employee engagement.

Susan Steinbrecher:

Yeah, absolutely. So one of the things that we teach in our workshop center in our coaching around meaningful alignment and how to achieve that, is what we call a map. So it's a six step process that says, "How do I start this conversation?" To all the way to, "How do I end this conversation?" With the purpose of finding out what is going on with this individual? Why are they disengaged? What is the particular issue? So this conversation is really an accountable problem-solving model.

Susan Steinbrecher:

If you will, it can be used in multiple ways, but in that process we do talk. Start with step one is communicating the purpose of the conversation, and I know that sounds probably commonsensical, but I think we've all had the situation where someone starts to talk to us and two minutes goes by and you still have no idea why they're talking to you. Because we've assumed what's in our head is in their head and it's not.

Susan Steinbrecher:

So starting with, the reason I wanted to talk to you today is I noticed in our last conversation you we're not really aligned with how we should be proceeding with that project. And thank you for taking time today, I know you're crazy busy, I really appreciate it and I know that you come up with great ideas and I'm really excited to tap into that.

Susan Steinbrecher:

So what you just heard in that example is I'm using skills to meet what I call the personal side of the equation of this individual. That people, that values, that they want in order to keep them engaged and keep the emotion more neutralized, and that is things like empathy, self-esteem or positive self-regard, empathetic responding and inviting participation. And then as you're kind of going through this road map, those skills need to be deployed to keep the task at hand, on target, keep the emotions neutralized and getting something actually done.

Susan Steinbrecher:

The second step is about discussing impact of the issue. What's the impact of you and I not being on the same page of how to handle that project? As an example. What do you always ask them first? What do you see as the impact? The reason we always ask first, that's a whole another self-esteem booster right there rather than you come in and saying, "Here's the problem, here's what we need to do about it and here's what you need to go do."

Susan Steinbrecher:

We're now asking them, "What is the impact from your perspective?" "Here's the impact from my perspective." And you also buys you a little bit of time and the event that they say something and you're

like, "Okay, now I'm understanding more." They think it's A impact and it's actually A, B, C, D and E, but now I can share the full impact. And then you move on to what do you think is causing it, of course, ask them first, then share yours, brainstorm solutions. Ask them first, then share yours, then come to a summarization of the solutions.

Susan Steinbrecher:

Which is, "Let me make sure you got to check for understanding here, let me make sure I heard you correctly. You're going to do this by this date, I'm going to do this by this date, did I get that right? And what have I missed?" And now you're really trying to make sure that you are aligned and you've communicated effectively because you don't want to end a conversation without that check.

Susan Steinbrecher:

And then the last is conclude with some kind of a followup, but the followup is critical because if they get it right and they've done everything they're supposed to do and they're now aligned, you already have the date set to thank them, positive self-regard again, thank them for the effort and all of that. If they haven't come through with what needs to be done, it's also a date already set, so we address the issue. So that's why we always conclude with... show gratitude, show appreciation, thank the individual and set a followup date.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, that's really good because it's still ultimately drives to results, right?

Susan Steinbrecher:

Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Like you're on an organization, in an organization trying to accomplish something.

Susan Steinbrecher:

That's right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So it still leads there.

Susan Steinbrecher:

Yeah, so it's used for multiple applications, you can use that same process at home. You and your son are not aligned on what time you should get up to go to school in the morning or whatever it is, it's the same process and I think it's just a good model that people can take and apply. Again, you can't just use the six step process without using what we call the four emotional management techniques, which is again listening, responding empathetically, enhancing their self-esteem or positive self-regard, inviting participation, and really being open to their viewpoint completely.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, it's been a big pivot for me too as a leader. I was in a one-on-one earlier this week and I shared before I let the employee share and I made a mental note, I'm like, "Should've been the other way around, I should have let the employee go first." Because what are you going to say? Disagree with your boss? Like, "What do you think?" Right?

Susan Steinbrecher:

Right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You're not going to disagree with your boss. Even if you really like your boss, you're not going to disagree with him.

Susan Steinbrecher:

No, because they're often fearful, they're sitting there, they're nervous, they're afraid, they're in "trouble". And so the more relaxed you are in that conversation where it's really the spirit, and we always say to leaders, "Listen, you go into an interaction like that as if we're just here to co-produce, co-create, co-resolve an issue," and it's not I'm coming in and just say, "I'm mad and I want to punish you." Pretty much 100% how that's going to go if you go in with that tone of voice on that body language, it's going to disconnect very quickly.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, well there's this statistic that you use that's almost unbelievable that people will spend 25 to 40% of their work week dealing with disputes, disagreements, and unresolved conflict.

Susan Steinbrecher:

Crazy, right?

Carey Nieuwhof:

And that is nuts, like almost up to half, a quarter to a half of your work week spent dealing with disputes and unresolved issues and disagreements, can you tell us about that?

Susan Steinbrecher:

Yeah, so when you think about it, I think about all the folks that I coach and how many conversations end up being centered around, "I have this employee and she's doing this or he's doing that, and I need to have the conversation, and I need to try to understand what's happening." Or, "My one direct report is not getting along with the other direct report.

Susan Steinbrecher:

Should I intervene? Should I mediate? What should I do?" I mean, there's just so much of a leader's time is spent around this and that's why we felt it was so critical to put out a book around this work and to provide processes and tools and build skill around this, because a leader is spending a very large portion of their time on this whole issue of conflict or just trying to get on the same page and align with someone else.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, and the interesting thing, I mean those are working hours, but that is the stuff you carry home, that's the stuff you talk to your significant other about, your spouse about at night, that's the stuff that you wake up at 3:00 in the morning going, "Oh, okay, how do I tackle that today?" Right?

Susan Steinbrecher:

Right, exactly.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Because I've had that too, why does it fester for so long?

Susan Steinbrecher:

Yeah, most people are not really good. I always say that people often, not all of course, but many lack the confidence, competence, and comfort to have this kind of a conversation. And what we see happen often is avoid, avoid, avoid to the point where we have seen such crazy behavior where people will not walk, like if two peers are not getting along, they will not walk in the same room, they avoid date, they don't attend meetings, I know they're going to be at.

Susan Steinbrecher:

And so that's often a way people deal with this which is not a functional way, but I understand where it comes from. Or you might have the opposite end of the spectrum, which is the bull in the China shop where this person bulldozes in and says, "This is exactly how I feel about this, and you're wrong and I'm right." That doesn't work either, so neither one or the opposite ends of the spectrum work.

Susan Steinbrecher:

What we want to do is help people or kind of find the sweet spot in the middle with how to have the adulthood, adult type of conversation and not what I call parent child. I mean, you're not talking down to this person, but you want to have equal respect for them being the whole human being with a life outside of work like you and come into some kind of an agreement. Or at least consensus sometimes is easier to achieve than agreement, if you know what I mean by that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

No, can you explain that a little bit?

Susan Steinbrecher:

Yeah, so we will spend a disproportionate amount of energy trying to get 100% agreement. Let's say in a meeting of leaders of 20 people in a room or a team, let's say you have 15 team members and the leader's trying to get everyone to agree, you probably won't be successful at that. Instead, the next best case is to at least form some kind of consensus, after we've used some processes to think through, everybody has a voice and there's all kinds of processes one can use to gain consensus.

Susan Steinbrecher:

But once that process is done then they say, "Listen, everybody had a vote, everybody got to say what they wanted to say." Here's where we have lined up with this group, now we need to all walk out with the united front. We may not have gotten what we wanted out of this, but we certainly had our due

process, we certainly got our voice heard and now we need to be the bigger people if you will, and present a united front.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay, so most people when you were talking a few minutes ago just about that person that they try to avoid being in the same room with or, "I'm not going down that hallway." Or, "Yeah, I don't need to be at that meeting." Almost everybody got a person in their mind either past or present where that was true. So how do you get through that?

Susan Steinbrecher:

Yeah, this is the hard part and it's not what you're going to want to do.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, exactly. Because you've been avoiding it for a long time and this is where I got you, right?

Susan Steinbrecher:

Right, this is where having the conversation really, really does matter, and again, that's why we gave the six steps process as a road map to do that. And at least in our training and coaching we share, we have people practice real scenarios about real people without mentioning names and actually getting feedback from other people at their table. We also put what we call a table coach at every round table of four or five participants, so that they can give just in time feedback in the moment because words matter.

Susan Steinbrecher:

How they show up via tone of voice and body language really matters, and so we're really providing all that coaching just in time to help build the skill. So it is about those kinds of things, it's about also having your own emotional composure and resilience. So you're having a conversation with this person. How do you not freak out yourself? They say something that starts to emotionally trigger you, so we teach some skills around that, like how to deflect the conversation if you need to? By asking questions.

Carey Nieuwhof:

How does that work? I start to get upset, I'm worried something, I'm either going to shut down or something inappropriate is going to come out of my mouth. How do I get through that?

Susan Steinbrecher:

I actually teach four things around that. The first is what we call pause, hit the pause button when you're inclined to speak, don't. Literally allow for the silence. And silence is usually uncomfortable for people and that usually creates the other person to start talking again. So that's one technique. Another is to deflect the conversation and you deflect by saying, "Can you share more about that? I really want to understand where what you're sharing. That's new information for me. I want to learn more, tell me more."

Susan Steinbrecher:

When you ask questions, you deflect the energy off of you, which allows you to do the next one, breathe, take the deep breath, focus on your breath. Now obviously you're in conversation but if you

can get the energy off of you by asking questions and another great way is to take notes. So you have a pad and pen in front of you, you're writing notes down, you're hearing this person, the writing gets the energy out of the body and on paper. And it also is a great self-esteem booster for the individual because they're like, "Oh, he's really paying attention here. He cares enough or she cares enough to be taking notes on what I'm even saying." So you get two wins without one.

Susan Steinbrecher:

And worst, worst case, and we've probably have all had this experience at some point in our life, whether personally or professionally, probably especially personally, is to delay. If you are emotionally triggered or hijacked 100% guarantee this is not going to go well.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, 100%. No question on that.

Susan Steinbrecher:

This is not going to go well. So to call it and say, "Hey listen, I'm upset. You're upset. Why don't we both take a step back, calm down, reconvene, come back tomorrow with the real willingness to try to come to some kind of an alignment with each other? Are you willing to do that?" And especially if you're in a leader position, they're not going to say no, they're probably going to go okay. So that's better than keep going, again 100% guarantee it's not going to go well.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's interesting because again we're talking about work but you're right, this is a life strategy. Could you imagine the next time like I'm married? Could you imagine the next time my wife has got something? I calm down, I breathe, I pull out a notepad and I'm like, "Let me hear that, what really bothers you again when I do what you do what?" I think I did that once actually in one of our disagreements just like, "Okay, I really want to be a student." And I think she almost died of a heart attack. So that's quite something.

Susan Steinbrecher:

Yeah, it will take people aback because people are not used to really full present empathetic, mindful listening, they're not used to that. It's almost disconcerting to some because they're so not used to that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I'm not claiming I do that regularly I'm just like...

Susan Steinbrecher:

Well me either, I mean I'm human too right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But that's a really wise. That's really, really wise to do that. And you thought you write a lot in your work, you talk a lot about emotional intelligence, Susan. So I mean obviously that could be a four-hour workshop in and of itself but really a lot of what we have been talking about is around emotional intelligence. So when you coach the tens of thousands of leaders listening to this episode, if they had

one or two areas to really start paying a little closer attention to emotional intelligence what would you encourage them to look for?

Susan Steinbrecher:

Yeah so one of the things we do is we actually have an assessment where we measure it like we really want to know what's the baseline...

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow, you measure it.

Susan Steinbrecher:

We really do. We have a baseline assessment where you want to figure out what is really going on here because there's a lot of sort of quadrants that make up EQ to your point. It's widely used and not really well-understood. The way I look at it, I try to be simple with this and say... I mean people think of EQ and this person's not empathetic. It's way more than that, way more than that.

Susan Steinbrecher:

So I look at it as two major camps, one is the inside game which is your ability to have emotional composure and resilience especially in the tough conversations or when the stakes are high, and your ability to hang in there like literally hold the tension in the moment with emotional control or management is actually better than control. I even like to use the word control and there's a whole another path to go down that, it's really emotional management.

Susan Steinbrecher:

So that's one side of it. And then the other is some of the skills I've shared already which is you're in the conversation you find yourself getting upset. What do I do right now? You use some of those practice systems and tools. I think what helps build emotional resilience and composure over time is and I think it's like working a muscle, I like to use the analogy if I decide all of the sudden I'm going to start lifting weights because I want to have more strength.

Susan Steinbrecher:

And I might start with some dumbbells and maybe I start with eight pounds curling dumbbells and then I might, so that becomes easier and I move to a 10 pound that I move to a 12 or 15. So now if I have to go pick up a heavy box it's relatively effortless for me to do so, why? Because I have the strength and reserve. I've been building this muscle over time, whereas if I haven't been doing the things like that I'm not building that muscle. Now I have to all of the sudden issue happens at work, issue happens at home. I now have to lift the heavy box, I'm going to exert a lot of effort and could even injure myself doing so.

Susan Steinbrecher:

So how do we do that? Well we do what we call through body, mind and spirit. So the body is physical taking care of self, that's sleeping at least seven to eight they say nine hours that's really hard for people, I get it, doing everything they can.

Carey Nieuwhof:

There's only on vacation.

Susan Steinbrecher:

Right. So sleep, good healthy clean eating, exercise and then one of the things that we find also is meditation for some that's a prayer or both. And then secondly that the whole emotional side of the equation the mind side of the equation is all the self-taught, negative self talk that we have a tendency to do and beat ourselves up with shifting that to instead of catastrophizing let's say a situation asking questions of what is a possibility, what is to stop, what could happen?

Susan Steinbrecher:

Is there something else happening here other than I think is what's happening here. And then on the spirit side for some it is the religious practice, for other it is meditation, for others it is the sense of purpose or it's prayer. And meditation is the one that we know statistically now is the one thing that really impacts all three areas, mind, body and spirit. So those are ways to build the strength so that you find yourself handling those moments much easier.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, I remember reading Daniel Goleman's Emotional Intelligence, he sort of started the got the ball rolling all those years ago but he talked about self-awareness and self-regulation. And I think one of the frontiers for EI it's not just, "Oh yeah I was a jerk in that meeting. I'm aware of that." It's self-regulation, right?

Susan Steinbrecher:

Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Being able to actually respond in the moment in a way that is positive like helpful, constructive.

Susan Steinbrecher:

That's right but what creates the space for you to do that is what we just talked about, because there's stimulus response and what we're teaching is, there is choice that might be a slim margin for some and others a wider one but there is choice where you can respond differently. The stronger the muscle that you have built in terms of the mind, body and spirit resilience the wider that lane is for you to basically get in there and interject the right thing at the right time.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You do talk quite a bit in your work about the difference in communication and personality styles too. So again, lots of different listeners, listening extroverts, introverts, if you follow the Enneagram stuff you've got every number on the spectrum blah, blah, blah, blah.

Susan Steinbrecher:

Correct.

Carey Nieuwhof:

How does all this impact, like some people would say, "Well, I'm just not that verbal or I'm just naturally not this way or I am this way." How does that like our innate wiring, how does that impact how we lead and how we should lead?

Susan Steinbrecher:

Thank you for asking the question because it's really a critical point. There's all kinds of personality tests and you just mentioned some of them and I'm certified in four of them so they're all good and they're all very helpful. We approach this work with saying, "We need to understand what's underneath the hood here, or the iceberg effect if you would," the mass that's holding up that iceberg is underneath the waterline and that's what we call people's mental models and mental models all those prevailing beliefs that they just took on due to life experiences. The good and bad and the ugly of life creates belief systems and value systems.

Susan Steinbrecher:

Often they serve us and often they don't. So that being said, we wanted to uncover what's going on underneath the surface and let's really address those belief systems that are creating how they show up in this high stakes conversation. So we did our own research around that we created a model and we identified six types, six dialogue styles that one is more apt to express in that high stake conversation.

Susan Steinbrecher:

And so underneath that is four primary motivations, it's usually someone coming from an achievement mentality if you will, get the goal done and get it done tomorrow or what we call an affiliation type of which is all about relationship and people and it's all about us versus me kind of thing. Security is another one. So it's about protection, holding the cards really close to the vest not quite going to show that one just yet.

Susan Steinbrecher:

And then we also have one around that sort of control, it's important to be in control for the people that fall on that side of the equation. And those six all falls somewhere within those, again it kind of map on top if you would of those four quadrants.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh wow. Wow. And so everybody just has a slightly different approach to it.

Susan Steinbrecher:

Or they might be very scored very high in one area and lower in another, and once they get the assessment which by the way we're giving that assessment for free right now on our website-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh cool.

Susan Steinbrecher:

... MeaningfulAlignment.com, because the book just came out in May and we want people to get the assessment for free so that they can learn their own style, how they're more likely to show up and learn from that experience and they can get that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay, we will link to that in the show notes.

Susan Steinbrecher:

What's that?

Carey Nieuwhof:

We've covered so much and I know that, I know that, we could've gone down any of these trails and there is literally a goldmine there and you could teach for days on any of the things that we talked about. But for the purposes of leaders listening I think everyone's probably been a little bit convicted that, "Okay, I need to be a little more empathetic probably listening more at work and take the whole person in view."

Carey Nieuwhof:

So can you just in closing coach, leaders, and like, "Here's some low hanging fruit. Here's one or two things you can do starting tomorrow that will make you easier to work with." Where would somebody even start with this?

Susan Steinbrecher:

I think beyond what we've shared today I would say the first thing to do is to look inside, we have a tendency to blame everybody else for what's going on and the truth is if you are really emotionally charged about something I promise you it's your stuff not somebody else's, because it will just roll off your back.

Susan Steinbrecher:

So ask yourself the question, what is it about this person? What is it about this situation that really is kind of getting my goat here? What's going on with that? And if you ask yourself the question more than likely you are going to find the answer, the brain will tell you if you will ask the question. So there's that.

Susan Steinbrecher:

And then and that's where it goes back to it's about me showing up my best way and I can respond my best way to other people through the skills we've talked about, knowing that deep down inside I love to use the analogy that 90% of us work off of emotion versus logic, we're really babies and big bodies. And instead of addressing people in a way that we feel like, "Well they should just get this and understand this," recognize you are dealing with a whole human being that's full of emotion and the more that you appeal to that you will get the goal accomplished, but you won't get it accomplished in a meaningful way without understanding that side of the equation.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Now, this has been so helpful and rich. So where can people learn more online? Where can they find you or find that?

Susan Steinbrecher:

Yeah, so MeaningfulAlignment.com is probably the quickest way we're on social media, we're on all the channels of course with that as well but MeaningfulAlignment.com, that's where we also have our free assessment and then they can learn a lot more about this work and myself and my team and everything else that we do. And my last name is Steinbrecher. So Steinbrecher.com also is another website we have that really explains all of the services that we provide.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's great. Susan, thank you so much.

Susan Steinbrecher:

Thank you so much, Carey. I appreciate it today.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well that was a fascinating conversation, would you not love to have your team stop spending up to 40% of their time resolving unnecessary conflict? That would be amazing. If you want more you can get it in the show notes at CareyNieuwhof.com/Episode325. We also have transcripts for you and hey, I've got my new segment What I'm Thinking About coming up at the end of this podcast. But in the meantime let me give you a sneak peek of what's next. On the next episode, I've got Adam Duckworth and Adam is the founder of Travelmation which is a travel agency that's literally disrupting the travel agency world.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And he's got a brand new model, it's fascinating, and he gives you the secret sauce behind it. We talk about the travel industry, how to motivate your team, Disney, and how to create an optimal workplace culture. Here's an excerpt.

Adam Duckworth:

Plus, the payouts from this particular travel agency were not great, they were not in the favor of the travel agent. So what I did is I sat on my couch and I dreamed up Travelmation and I said, "I'm not going to take what I'm discontent about and cast that onto other people. I'm not going to create the same thing. I flipped the payout structure based on what I was discontent about and gave more to the agents on the front end, which is one of the things that our team has I think benefited from long-term in terms of growth.

Adam Duckworth:

So with all that to say, I let the discontentment of an organization that I was a part of lead me into where I'm at today. Interestingly enough Carey, about three years after we started Travelmation, we absorbed the company that I used to work for.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So that's next episode subscribers who get that free if you haven't subscribed yet please do so. And today's episode brought to you by Leaders in Living Rooms, if you are looking for a podcast to subscribe to I would suggest you add that to your list. It's on Apple Podcasts anywhere you get your podcasts and by The Leader's Circle, you can sign up now before March 13th to get in. We'll close registration and I can't wait to welcome you into a community where it can get a lot more personal. So check it out at

TheLeadersCircle.live, TheLeadersCircle.live. Well here's what I'm thinking about these days, I am thinking about sliced apples. We live in a really interesting age where I think people are just so overwhelmed by the sheer volume of content.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I mean look at even at this podcast it's 325 episodes right? We're not stopping and there's 750,000 podcasts and all the TED Talks and like, "There's a lot of content." And so think about this next time you go to the supermarket. You can buy an apple and you just get the whole apple or you can buy sliced apples. Now, what's really interesting is people will pay two, three, four, five times the price for someone else to slice an apple for them. I think that's the result of two things happening in our culture. Number one, people are overwhelmed, they're just like completely overwhelmed. And secondly, decision fatigue. I mean, do you ever get to the end of the day where you're like, "I just can't think about one more thing."

Carey Nieuwhof:

So I think what's happening in our culture is that we're moving from a do-it-yourself culture to a do-it-for-me culture, DIFM culture where people are like, "Hey, would you just do this for me?" I mean I went through the IKEA phase of furniture myself, you may remember the IKEA phase or be in it. But I think that you reach a certain point where you're just like, "I just want someone to come in, set off the furniture, I don't have to think about it, take away the garbage like that's just life. It's so overwhelming."

Carey Nieuwhof:

And so when you're thinking about your organization or you're thinking about what you're doing maybe the problem isn't your product, maybe it's a delivery system right? Like you think about something as simple as a sliced apple. It's like, "Okay well nobody's buying my apples are you kidding me?" They're actually overwhelmed they're too overwhelmed to pull a knife out of the drawer and cut it themselves and put it in their kid's lunch, I have to do that for them. And the answer in our culture today is actually yes. Yes, if you would just slice that apple for that overwhelm mom or dad, they will gladly pay you for that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And it's like really? So think about your website, is your website simple? Have you sliced the apple for your listeners? Or are there like 1700 buttons on it? And is it really confusing and is the font small? If you're thinking about like even your parking lot, is were the park clear? Are things clearly marked? Is access easy?

Carey Nieuwhof:

I mean we really live in a very overwhelmed world, and so I would sit down with your leadership team and have a conversation about how to slice the apple for the people that you serve whether that's the people in your church, like maybe if you're a church leader you're like, "Well we have 17 steps that people can take if they want to do something beyond attending," it's like, "Well, are you really slicing the apple for them, do you maybe need one step?" Because we know about the paralysis of choice right? If you're faced with six choices you choose nothing if you're faced with two or three or one you make a decision.

Carey Nieuwhof:

This transcript was exported on Mar 02, 2020 - view latest version [here](#).

So I think this is a really big thing in our culture and I would really pay attention to it. In fact, I teach more on slicing the apple inside The Leader's Circle live and to get really meta on you. The Leader's Circle is actually my attempt to slice the apple for leaders. It gives you access to me, it gives you access to a tribe of other leaders, and a highly-curated, calorie dense content that is short, powerful, and it's staff meeting done for you. So you never need to think about it again and I actually show you how to do it if you want to do it yourself.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So if you want to check out more head on over to TheLeadersCircle.live while it's open and regardless, talk to your team about how to slice the apple for the people that you serve. I think it'll be a highly productive conversation. That's what I'm thinking about. Guys are back next time with a fresh episode. Thanks so much for listening and I hope our time together today helps you lead like never before.

Announcer:

You've been listening to the Carey Nieuwhof Leadership Podcast. Join us next time for more insights on leadership, change and personal growth to help you lead like never before.