

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 337 of the podcast. My name is Carey Nieuwhof, and I hope our time together today helps you lead like never before. Man, this is three in a row for us, but hey, we're in the middle of something we haven't been through before so we want to come alongside you. I hope you enjoyed Mike Todd on the last two episodes. I thought they were fantastic, and you will be so thrilled you tuned in again for this one because I've got Steve Cuss. He is my guest, and we are going to talk about managing leadership anxiety, spotting unlikely signs of stress in yourself. Some of the stuff he shared with me really shocked me, like surprised me. It's like, "Really? That's stress? Anxiety? You kidding me?" Anyway, and how to tame your fears in a crisis.

Carey Nieuwhof :

So I think you're going to find this helpful. This episode is brought to you by The Ascent Leader co-horts and by Generis. And yeah, I'm going to talk also at the end about the biggest mistake I think people can make as America reopens and you go back to normal. So I'll do that at the very end in the What I'm Thinking About segment.

Carey Nieuwhof :

But anyway, we've got a great episode lined up for you today and I really hope this is coming alongside you. I know these are really unusual times, and podcasts listening overall has gone down significantly in the last two months, but ours has gone up thanks to you. And thank you so much for dialing in, sharing this with your friends, subscribing, and letting us know on social media that this really matters to you.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Also, for those of you who leave ratings and reviews, I am so grateful for that. I just want to say thank you. And hey, if you haven't yet made it over to my crisis course, you can do that at [HowToLeadThroughCrisis.com](http://HowToLeadThroughCrisis.com). I've got some new resources coming up in May that I'm very excited about, but in the meantime you can get [HowToLeadThroughCrisis.com](http://HowToLeadThroughCrisis.com) for free or text the word CRISIS to 33777.

Carey Nieuwhof :

So, maybe you've got a transition coming up in your future, even five to ten years out. I transitioned out of the senior leadership role at our church about five years ago. And if that's the case, you probably know that this is a significant moment in your life. So, Sean Morgan over CDF Capital curates custom-built co-horts for senior leaders, and you can apply to be part of one at [TheAscentLeader.org](http://TheAscentLeader.org). It's a unique living room style co-hort set of gatherings for this co-hort.

Carey Nieuwhof :

You will actually be with Kenton and Laurie Beshore for three days in Palm Desert, California. That sounds pretty good. Kenton was a long time senior pastor of Mariners Church, which I joke is the spa church, if you've ever been there, one of the largest churches in the US, and you'll have some really

transparent conversations on the sensitive nature of leadership succession. And you will get personal mentorship from Kenton and Laurie and advice from high level peers. There are limited spots available, so apply now [TheAscentLeader.org](http://TheAscentLeader.org). So I would highly recommend that.

Carey Nieuwhof :

One of the things that's happened in this crisis is that so many people, almost every organization's budget, has been blown up, and it's just, we've all rebooted. And what do you do if you're a church and your whole giving plan is off? Well, Generis has a brand new resource called *Your Budget Just Blew Up...Now What?* I'm going to tell you how to get it. But I sat down with their founder and principal, Jim Sheppard, and I said to him, "We got a number of churches listening who will be in the majority, in other words, giving is not up. Is all hope lost or is there a pivot that churches that are struggling financially could make?" Here's what Jim Sheppard had to say.

Jim Sheppard:

Yeah, so if innovation flourishes in a time of disruptive change, so does stagnation for those who are unwilling to embrace the moment. And I would say for those who are watching that happen, embrace the moment, decide for yourself. You know, what is it that's getting in our way? Is our model of ministry, is our philosophy of ministry, is the way that we approach things, are those things that are getting in the way? And if they are, what would we do to address them?

Jim Sheppard:

I think the other thing, you know, really low hanging fruit is, if you're a church with 15, 17% non-plate giving, I use that for all the sources outside of Sunday morning, and you've watched your friends who have got 60, 70 and more percent of their giving coming non-plate, you've realize there's a difference between them and you in this moment. And probably one of the things you're doing is trying to think through how can we get more people to give, take all the friction out of it, and encourage people in this season?

Carey Nieuwhof :

Well, Jim has got a lot of great advice, and so does Generis, and they put together a free resource for you. It's called *Your 2020 Budget Just Blew Up...Now What?* And in this ebook, I had to look through it, it's great actually, it's got some very practical advice on how to strengthen your church right now to weather the current storm and actually thrive in the months ahead. Generis is making this new resource available exclusively to podcast listeners of this audience before they release it to everyone else. And there's a bonus chapter just for you. You can get it for free by going to [Generis.com/Carey2020](http://Generis.com/Carey2020). that's [Generis.com/Carey2020](http://Generis.com/Carey2020). There's also a support hotline for anyone who needs some in the moment assistance. So they've got you completely covered at Generis. Check it out. [Generis.com/Carey2020](http://Generis.com/Carey2020).

Carey Nieuwhof :

Well, I am so excited to introduce you to Steve Cuss. This was a fascinating conversation. As always, I feel like I get free therapy out of this, so there may be a little bit of that in this conversation perhaps. Steve is a pastor of a large church in Broomfield, Colorado, but you'll hear a lot of the interview focuses on his experience as a counselor and back when he served as a chaplain at a level I trauma hospital where he learned so much. I didn't even know what like a level I trauma hospital was, but it's the hardest stuff life throws at you.

Carey Nieuwhof :

And we talk about managing leadership anxiety, your anxiety, the anxiety of the people you lead, your team, your congregation right now, the anxiety of the world. What do you do with it? This is a fascinating conversation. So let's get right into it, my conversation with Steve Cuss.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Well, Steve, welcome to the podcast.

Steve Cuss:

Thanks, Carey. Great to be on with you.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Yeah, yeah. And you got that nice Aussie accent going, from Perth originally.

Steve Cuss:

Yeah, I grew up in Perth, Western Australia, was raised by an unchurched family. And yeah, came to Christ as a teenager in Perth, and then I ended up moving to America for my theological study. So I wound up in Tennessee for a while and here I am in Colorado now.

Carey Nieuwhof :

So you're pretty much an American.

Steve Cuss:

That's so funny, right? I mean, I've been living here 25 years. I think I still, I think like an Aussie. No doubt. But my voice has definitely changed. My family would say I sound very American now.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Yeah. And the Americans would say, "Wow, you sound Australian."

Steve Cuss:

Yeah, yeah, for sure. Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof :

That's like my dad. He came from Holland when he was 19, and the Dutch say he doesn't speak Dutch and the English say, "Wow, you have a really strong accent." So.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Yeah, he's kind of homeless linguistically which is good.

Steve Cuss:

Which it's not wrong, kind of a third culture thing.

Carey Nieuwhof :

It is.

Steve Cuss:

It's a real thing, yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof :

So Steve, we're talking about anxiety and stress and all those things, which is such a huge point of any kind of crisis you're walking into, and now, the biggest crisis the world has faced in decades, perhaps centuries, is on us and leaders are feeling it, particularly by the time this airs.

Steve Cuss:

Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof :

So you've got a background in counseling and you started at a level I trauma hospital. I don't even know what that is. Like what is level I trauma? And I didn't even know they had hospitals dedicated to trauma. What is that?

Steve Cuss:

Oh yeah, great question. Yeah, level I trauma is the trauma you don't want to be in.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Okay.

Steve Cuss:

So every city has at least one hospital where the emerge... It's the people in the worst shape are sent to that hospital. So a level I trauma hospital would have the helicopter, and then oftentimes if someone ends up in one ER, but they're in bad shape, they'll then get transferred over to the level I trauma.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Wow.

Steve Cuss:

So it's a technical term. I don't know, there's probably a couple of hundred level I trauma hospitals in America, or at least the United States, but it's really the level of surgery that someone's able to perform when somebody has been in a car wreck.

Steve Cuss:

So I was a hospital chaplain at this hospital and some multi-car pileups are going to come to us, gang fights. One of my most unique experiences was being in the middle of a gang fight in a ER waiting lounge. It's really the microcosm of any city winds up in a level I trauma hospital, and I was there to be the hospital chaplain, well, one of the chaplains. And I was 24 years of age and I'd never seen a dead body before. I'd never experienced grief before. I'd been married a week, and my first day on the job was a 28 hour overnight shift. And that's where it all got started.

Carey Nieuwhof :

So you're dealing with literally the most stressful situations anyone could be in in this life? For the most part?

Steve Cuss:

It was crazy. You know, 24 year old, basically a kid with a brand new Bible degree, but no real world experience in ministry. And the first day on the job, I'm literally there overnight. I've got my overnight bag and they're touring us through the hospital. There's several new chaplains. So just to give some context, Carey-

Carey Nieuwhof :

Yeah.

Steve Cuss:

I was a chaplain resident, which is another technical term. If you've ever watched medical dramas, you see medical residents, the medical students doing a residency, a chaplain residency is ministry students doing a residency in a hospital.

Steve Cuss:

So I was there as a chaplain resident. There were six new chaplain residents. They're touring us through and my beeper goes off. And I had four beepers. Because I was the overnight guy, I had the extra on call stuff. And I remember saying to the supervisor, Randy, I said, "Okay, now which beep is this one?" Because I was getting them all confused, and he said, "Oh yeah, that's the code team." And the code team is anytime somebody heart stops anywhere in the hospital, the chaplain has to go.

Steve Cuss:

And again, if you've watched your hospital dramas, you see the doctors and nurses and they're running in with a cart, and the paddles and the commands. What they don't show on the TV show is there's almost always a chaplain with the loved ones. And you're sitting on the carpet with your back against the wall out in the hallway, the door's open right behind you, you can hear everything going on. And of course doctors and nurses, they have something to do. They get to command and they get to say, "Clear," and try to save to life. Your job as a chaplain is to sit as much as a non-anxious presence as you can with the family and just wait.

Steve Cuss:

So that's the code team. So the beeper went off, it's the code team. And I said to Randy, "Okay, what do I do now?" Because we hadn't had any training, and he said, "Well, I guess we're about to find out, aren't we?" Yeah. And I looked at him, because I was the young kid, I was the youngest by a good decade on the new group, and I thought he was pranking the young kid. But he wasn't. He was dead serious. And I said, "Okay, well what if I make a mistake?" And he said, "Oh, this year, you're going to make hundreds and hundreds of mistakes."

Steve Cuss:

And that was the extent of my training. And so three minutes later, I'm in an intensive care waiting lounge. There's 12 to 15 family members. The matriarch had suddenly died on the surgery table. They

couldn't revive her. So by the time I got there, she had died. The doctors had told the family and I showed up maybe 30 seconds or a minute later after the doctors had told them. And people were screaming. I mean, it's just one of those things you'll never forget. There was a woman headbutting the wall, just in a rhythm, there was a woman vomiting in a trashcan. The whole room was just absolute mayhem, and my job was to do something. And that was my very first encounter for a year of level I trauma chaplaincy.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Wow.

Steve Cuss:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof :

And that got your interest in how do you help people? And your book, by the way, which our mutual friend Kevin Queen from Crosspoint, Nashville, he said, "Carey, you got to get to know Steve Cuss." I guess you guys have gotten to know each other.

Steve Cuss:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Your book's called Managing Leadership Anxiety, Yours and Theirs.

Steve Cuss:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof :

And as much as that introduced you to their anxiety, I want to talk a little bit, I want to drill down on our anxiety, my anxiety-

Steve Cuss:

Yeah, anxiety.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Because you got 40,000, 50,000 listeners hearing this-

Steve Cuss:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Right now and they're in the middle of some pretty intense anxiety.

Steve Cuss:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof :

And I want to start by how you manage leadership anxiety. So let's go back to pre-COVID for a minute.

Steve Cuss:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Leadership is tough at the best of times.

Steve Cuss:

Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof :

People burn out all the time. Anxiety, stress, depression, they're all very endemic for leaders. But I would love to know what were some of the major stressors, if you can call it that, even prior to COVID, and then we're going to talk about how COVID elevated everything.

Steve Cuss:

Sure. Yeah, that's a great question. So let me just take you back to that intensive care lounge. And then obviously I'm a lead pastor now. I'll talk about leadership anxiety too because they are connected.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Yeah.

Steve Cuss:

You know, you put a young guy in an intensive care waiting lounge when he's the chaplain and his job is, at least he believes his job is to do something. Everything I was trying to do with that family, none of it was working because they're in shock. And now what's happened is-

Carey Nieuwhof :

Yeah, what did you try to do? I'm just curious because you're bringing me back to a few moments in my life.

Steve Cuss:

Oh, sure. Oh my goodness Carey, you know, I walk into that room and there's doctors and nurses in the room. They're all wearing the white lab coats.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Yeah.

Steve Cuss:

And I remember thinking to myself, because literally the day before I'd been on my honeymoon, this was such a massive like baptism of fire, and I remember thinking to myself, "Well the doctors and nurses here, they'll know what to do." So I just kind of took a step back. And it literally was, not an out of body experience, but I kind of describe it like the old days of the DVD director's commentary where you're observing the movie, but you're not in it. I was kind of watching it as if I wasn't there.

Steve Cuss:

Next thing I know, there's no doctors and nurses in the room, and of course they've said to themselves, "Well thank God the chaplain's here, he'll know what to do." Because no one knows what to do in the face of grief.

Carey Nieuwhof :

In med school, they cover that. I have lots of medical friends, right?

Steve Cuss:

Yeah, that's right.

Carey Nieuwhof :

In the same way that seminary didn't really cover that, yeah.

Steve Cuss:

That's right. No, you can only learn it on the fly. And that really was that moment, I mean, I couldn't have said it at the time, but that moment really was the beginning of my awareness, for the first time in my life, that I had this whole inner life under the surface that boils up like a volcano when I'm under pressure. And it's connected to the story I tell myself about myself, it's connected to childhood triggers, it's connected to a lot of things.

Steve Cuss:

And so, for example, in my case, I believe the lie that I should always know what to do in any given situation. And I think that is a common struggle for almost every leader I know is we tend to believe that we're supposed to know.

Steve Cuss:

And another particular for me, one of the things I do in the book is I break down, every one of us, Carey, have unique sources of anxiety that are unique to each of us, and that's related to childhood and Enneagram and it's quite a complex thing. But in my case, for example, I'm a chronic people pleaser, always have been.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Wow. So are many pastors. Oh my gosh.

Steve Cuss:

So many pastors are.

Carey Nieuwhof :



Yeah.

Steve Cuss:

And then some other leaders are perfectionists. They believe the lie that they have to get it right the first time, every time.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Yeah.

Steve Cuss:

Now I don't actually operate that way, but I've got friends who do. So we all have these unique things that if we don't get them, we get anxious.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Right.

Steve Cuss:

But then we also have a universal set of circumstances that no matter what, if you and I are in the same circumstance, it doesn't matter how we're wired, it doesn't matter our Enneagram number, it's going to generate anxiety for us. And one of the universal sources for a leader is when you're supposed to do something and you don't know what to do, that's just a go-to that will generate anxiety in your life.

Steve Cuss:

And so there I'm in the waiting lounge and so what I tried to do is I tried to speak to the room. I remember the very first thing I said to them is I just said, "Hey, could someone tell me what happened?" Because I didn't even know what had happened. And of course no one even knew I was in the room.

Steve Cuss:

At some point, the charge nurse came in. And I'd never met her. I'd been on the job for about an hour. We'd just been touring the hospital. She comes in, and I can already tell from my body language, she's upset at me. I've never even met her and she's already mad at me. And I look at her and she says, "Come on, Chaplain. We need to get the family in. They need to visit their mom. They need to get out, we need the bed, we have to turn the sheets. We've got another patient waiting. Let's go."

Steve Cuss:

So one of my chronic needs is I need to please a stranger. I've always been this way. It's weird. And so what happens, is if you're not aware of what's going under the surface in you, you end up operating out of false needs instead of what the situation really requires. So instead of caring for this family, now I'm trying to please the nurse.

Steve Cuss:

Now what was the gift of chaplaincy for me is it put me in daily death and trauma. I attended to about 300 deaths the year I was a chaplain. I did hospice work, end of life care, a crazy experience for a guy my age. But what it did is it just gave me like a crucible by which I now see all leadership because all

leadership is some form of vulnerable experience. Every one of us as leaders, we're putting ourselves out there, we're leading in unknown territory.

Steve Cuss:

So what I try to coach leaders to do is just to really start to pay attention to what's known as chronic anxiety, which is a particular form of anxiety that happens. Chronic anxiety shows up when you don't get what you think you need that you don't really need. So I believe I need-

Carey Nieuwhof :

Okay, unpack that a little bit. What do you mean by that?

Steve Cuss:

Yeah, so I believe I need people to like me. That's not actually true. I can actually survive, I can actually thrive without people liking me. But if I think someone doesn't like me, I get anxious.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Gotcha.

Steve Cuss:

I believe I need to always know what to do, but that's not true. I can actually survive without knowing what to do.

Carey Nieuwhof :

So can I give you another example?

Steve Cuss:

Please.

Carey Nieuwhof :

I'm not a people pleaser. You know, everybody has, unless you're a sociopath or psychopath-

Steve Cuss:

Sure.

Carey Nieuwhof :

You probably have some people pleasing in you, but mine would be performance. If I felt I didn't do a good job or you didn't see the good job that I did, then that you're saying would trigger anxiety in me?

Steve Cuss:

Yes, that's right. That's a great example actually, Carey.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Okay.

Steve Cuss:

Like if you're able to name, "I'm the kind of person that believes that I need to be productive," but you are also going a little deeper for us, you are also saying, "I actually need to be noticed for my productivity." Is that accurate?

Carey Nieuwhof :

Oh yeah, I've spent a lot of time unpacking this stuff.

Steve Cuss:

I'm sure you have. Yeah, most people our age... And I know you've also written a book quite similar to this.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Yeah.

Steve Cuss:

Like you've done a lot of your own deep work.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Yeah.

Steve Cuss:

Yeah, so then what I would be doing is encouraging somebody like yourself, "Okay, well what happens next? Like when you don't get that pat on the back, what shows up in your body?" A lot of leaders, particularly type A driven leaders, they would be listening to this and they'd be saying, "Well I'm not really an anxious person."

Carey Nieuwhof :

Yeah. True.

Steve Cuss:

That's because they say anxiety is worry and fear, and they don't tend to worry much and they're not afraid of much, but chronic anxiety actually is what you do next when you don't get what you think you need. And so maybe it's that you're chasing someone down for a meeting. You know, early in my leadership at the church, people would, we were a small church, people would leave and then one of the elders maybe would contact them and they'd say, "Well, Steve just didn't reach out to me enough. We didn't get together very much." And because I'd felt like I'd let them down, I would try to lynch them back into the church, if that makes sense. Right?

Carey Nieuwhof :

You're reading no one's mail here, Steve.

Steve Cuss:

Right, right, right. So I'd like lynch them back into the church. I remember the moment where I'm waiting for a guy. The only time he could meet was 5:00 AM. Do you know how hard it is to find somewhere that's open at at 5:00 AM?

Carey Nieuwhof :

Yeah, no kidding.

Steve Cuss:

Right.

Carey Nieuwhof :

That's a story in and of itself. "I can only meet a 5:00 AM."

Steve Cuss:

I'm sitting at this diner at 5:00 AM, he stands me up, and I'm like, "What am I doing?" Because I'd lynched them back into church and I couldn't maintain that. And then they'd get angry and leave again of course, but where you start having breakthroughs as a leader is when you can name this false need, this chronic anxiety, and then you can name, "What do I do next that's crazy?" And Carey, if people, if your listeners aren't sure what they'd do next, all they have to do is ask a loved one and the loved one will tell them that. Most people around us know-

Carey Nieuwhof :

Can you give me some examples? So you would try to buy someone back into the church.

Steve Cuss:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof :

I'm going to take you for lunch, we're going to hang out. What would be some other examples? It would be like, I might say, "Oh, well did you see this?" Or I might start self-promoting or something like that, right?

Steve Cuss:

Right. That's right.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Okay.

Steve Cuss:

Yeah, in your case, you might do some subtle or not so subtle promoting of yourself. An example from my life, I uncovered a false need about 10 years ago. I've been a lead pastor for 14 years, so I've been a regular preacher 14 years. I've been in ministry 25, but preaching regularly for 14. About 10 years ago I realized, as I was doing this work myself, "Oh, wow, I believe the lie that every single sermon I preached must be gold standard." And what would happen is if I wasn't happy with a sermon, I'd be deeply

depressed. Well, not deeply, but I'd be really down. But if I really liked the sermon, it was worse. I'd put myself under even more pressure for the next one.

Carey Nieuwhof :

So you thought it was great, but somehow it missed the mark?

Steve Cuss:

Or how am I going to top it?

Carey Nieuwhof :

Oh, gotcha. Okay. Yeah.

Steve Cuss:

Right? That was so good, now I need to top it. And so what that looks like is I needed, after every sermon, after every sermon, I needed some kind of a golden retriever pat on the head that would be some version of someone saying, "This is the most amazing message I've ever heard in my life." Like maybe in my fantasy, people that say, "Jesus himself could not have constructed the message you gave."

Steve Cuss:

Now, here's where it gets crazy, Carey, is I put that pressure on my wife. Now-

Carey Nieuwhof :

I was like, "Were you at every lunch on Sunday with my wife and I when I was in my 30s?"

Steve Cuss:

Right.

PART 1 OF 4 ENDS [00:23:04]

Carey Nieuwhof:

That was the conversation.

Steve Cuss:

Now, here's what's true, Carey, is I now preach about 35 times a year. I used to preach like 45 to 50. I preach about 35 times a year. I've got about 20 to 25 good messages in me, and none of us know which ones it's going to be. It's the nature of it. But I pressured my wife, she needed to love every message. She no longer has the right, just like everyone else in the church, to disagree with it, hate it, be bored by it, all the normal reactions that anyone's going to have once in a while. So, I'd go home, and I'd say... I wasn't vulnerable enough to say to my wife, "I need a pat on the head right now," so instead I'd say, "Hey, honey, how was church?" And she'd say, "Oh, it was fine. It was fine." And then, I'd say, "Well, how'd you like worship?" And I'm fishing.

Steve Cuss:

But the good news of the gospel is, Jesus died to free me from needing to live for every sermon being gold standard. That would just be like one example broken down in, "Okay, what's the lie I believed? And then, what's the crazy impact on me and others?" And so, I've actually been free for about 10 years of needing every sermon to be gold standard. The crazy thing is, I still have a driving passion to be the best communicator I can be. It's not that I end up some hippy smoking weed, not caring what people think, it's that I'm no longer in the grip of this tyranny. And that's what chronic anxiety is. It gets us in a tyrannous grip, and it takes us off the gospel. That would be my big idea.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Isn't that interesting? I've had a similar experience. I think most people would say I'm a better communicator than when I was locked in the performance cycle, that I've actually gotten a lot better, but I need it less. I don't need it to be the best message ever. Real quick, because I want to get into crisis management and leadership, what are some of the other sources of chronic anxiety or some other examples? Because leaders do carry a lot of pressure in the corporate world, in pastoral ministry, in church leadership. It's just a lot of pressure. You're responsible for hundreds of volunteers, millions of dollars, thousands of people, dozens of people, hundreds of people, whatever your particular numbers happen to be, and people feel that. Any other general stressors that leaders would be under outside of wartime conditions or crisis conditions?

Steve Cuss:

Oh yeah. Great question. So many, Carey. And I know you're very aware, and there are so many pressures. So, there is sources of anxiety within us, that's what we just covered, but then there are these environmental, what I call in the book, internal and external. These are the ones that are common to us all, and there are 19 of them.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow.

Steve Cuss:

So, I'll give you a couple of examples. Anytime you're in a triangulated relationship, you're going to be anxious. So, a triangulated relationship would simply be any relationship that has three people in it that should only have two people in it. The gossip is always going to generate anxiety because it's always a triangulated relationship. Every middle school relationship you've ever seen. You're a dad, right? You've got kids?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, yeah. I've got two boys.

Steve Cuss:

Yeah, I thought so. Yeah. So, you picture any middle schooler where Cindy goes to David, and Cindy says, "Hey, David, Jane really likes you, and if you like her, you tell me and I'll go back and tell Jane." That's a triangulated relationship.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yep. Lots of anxiety right there.

Steve Cuss:

Always. And particularly, whether you're a faith leader or a business leader. So, let's talk about in our staff meetings, every one of us have in our organization a person who always speaks up, person who never speaks up unless they're spoken, every team has those people that have the meeting after the meeting. They have their own little side meeting. That's a triangulated relationship. So, anytime there's indirect communication, the leader's going to be anxious. Another source of anxiety that's common to every human is called a double bind. And that's-

Carey Nieuwhof:

What's that?

Steve Cuss:

... two situations where no matter what you choose, you lose. So, Jimmy comes down Christmas morning to open his gifts, and he's got two gifts under the tree. And he opens them, and they're both flannel shirts. And one is red and one is blue, and they're the same company just different colors. And he likes them both. And later in the day for Christmas dinner, he comes down for Christmas dinner, he's wearing the blue shirt, and his mom says, "Well, what was wrong with the red shirt? Didn't you like the red shirt?" That's a double bind.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yep.

Steve Cuss:

Now, the reason it's internal and external, some of us put ourselves in internal double binds. If you struggle to make a decision, you're prone to double binding, and if you finally make the decision and you spend the time regretting and wondering what the other decision would have been, you're in a double bind. So, on the most base level, if you have a loved one, you go out to a restaurant with that loved one, and they take forever to order, they're probably double binding themselves right there on the menu.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, yeah.

Steve Cuss:

Like, "Man, if I order the burger, maybe I should've gotten the salad," or whatever.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I hear you.

Steve Cuss:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, a lot of moments flashed through my eyes, and it's really interesting. I think as we've gotten healthier, like one of the things is no indirect communication on my teams, period. If you have a

problem, you go direct to the person. You don't triangulate. That really is a chronic stress, anxiety reducer for everyone, not just the leader, but the whole team.

Steve Cuss:

That's right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, we could do the whole podcast on normalized anxiety, which we probably will at some point in the future, but these aren't normal conditions. And all of a sudden, COVID comes along. We got Coronavirus leadership, the world grinds to a halt, it melts down, thousands of people are dying, everyone's in lockdown. I mean, oh my goodness, when you look at the elevation of stress and anxiety as a result of what we're going through right now, can you talk about just, in a general sense, how that elevates stress and what people are...

Carey Nieuwhof:

Just describe for us. Because I think I've talked about this with a lot of leaders, Steve, and you and I talked about it before we started recording, but a lot of us just go into, as leaders, siege mode. I call it siege mode. It's like, "Okay, we got to pivot. We got to be 100% virtual, 100% percent digital overnight. All right. Everyone still has their job, or I got to make some layoffs. Or I got to call all the investors. Or I got to call all the donors, the key donors. Or I got to do this, or I got to do that." We're just in siege mode, and we know we're stressed, but it's almost like we're just in that panic scramble mode. What is going on in those early days when our stress gets elevated by things outside of our control?

Steve Cuss:

Yeah. That's such a great question, Carey. I think it helps to have a general understanding of a theology of anxiety. I think anxiety is actually a spiritual force, and that I think we don't take it seriously enough because we don't see it as a threat. Most leaders are prone to action, so when we're anxious, we act more.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Isn't that interesting?

Steve Cuss:

Yeah. And so, you're seeing a lot... And I know a lot of your listeners are pastors, we're seeing so many pastors triple the amount of content they're producing. I want to be real careful, Carey, because I think the heart behind producing more content for your people is that's a good heart, but I would just encourage leaders to ask, "Why are you doing it? What are you trying to accomplish?" Because some of the content we're producing is more to feel the need to do something than it really is to help out people.

Steve Cuss:

And that was an early lesson I had to learn as a chaplain. My first three months of chaplaincy, the amount of times I would say something to somebody in grief, because I didn't know how to simply walk into the space of pain they were in... And leaders are particularly prone to this, Carey. When somebody is in a real difficult situation, we tend to need to shrink their problem down to a size we can manage so



that we can then tell them what to do, and we're not aware that that's actually an anxious response. So, I want to be careful. I'm not saying that every type A leader is acting anxiously. I wouldn't-

Carey Nieuwhof:

No, no, no, but I hear that. My response in a crisis is always to do something.

Steve Cuss:

That's true. What are we going to do?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. I've produced a lot more content. That's really interesting.

Steve Cuss:

Yeah. And again, I'm not saying all the content is a problem, or it could be a gift, but just to pay attention to ourselves. A classic leader, because we are others focused, because we're driven, we want to be productive, we're usually the last to know when we're anxious. So, one of the early lessons I learned as a chaplain when I was on the code team is one of the code doctors pulled me aside, I'll never forget it, and he said, "Hey, when somebody's heart stops, first take your own pulse." And that was just a simple, little idea that, "Listen, take care of yourself before you act. Just that little pause." I think flight attendants, right? Every time you fly they say, "In the unlikely event that we're going to lose cabin pressure," that statement was obviously written by a lawyer-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yes, true.

Carey Nieuwhof:

"In the unlikely event of a water landing," it's like, why do you say that every time?

Steve Cuss:

Yeah, that's right. But then, they say, "We'll lose cabin pressure. Oxygen masks will drop. First, put the mask on your own face before helping others." And you're going to ask yourself, "Why are flight attendants smarter than a whole lot of leaders?" And I do think it's because we don't believe that attending to ourselves is sometimes the way to grow our capacity to lead in anxious times.

Steve Cuss:

And so, when Jesus calls us to love our neighbor, there's actually two ways we can faithfully fulfill that command. One is pouring ourselves out, dying on a hill. That's true. Most leaders I know that's our go-to. But the second is filling ourselves up and loving and caring out of the overflow. And I think this is an opportunity for our leaders to get real clear on what's my default? Because my default is I always pour it out. I pour it out, out, out, out, and then suddenly, I'm running on fumes and I'm surprised. So, I think what's going on in COVID is there's tremendous anxiety because no one knows what to do. There's very few people in the world that actually know what's going on.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So true.

Steve Cuss:

And so, we're anxious in ambiguity. Ambiguity is always a source of anxiety. And for most type A leaders, not knowing what to do, particularly if people are asking you to do something, you're going to be more anxious. Second thing Carey, is obviously I wrote about Yours and Theirs in the book, anxiety is always contagious in any group. And the most anxious person in the room has the most power. You just think about whatever-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, wow.

Steve Cuss:

Yeah. Whatever staff meeting you ran, you already know who the most anxious person in the room is. Not only that, everyone in the room knows who the most anxious person is.

Carey Nieuwhof:

The most anxious person in the room has the most power. Can you unpack that? Because that's not always a healthy dynamic.

Steve Cuss:

Oh, it's not. It's why pastors leave churches, because they don't know how to manage one anxious elder that infects all the other elders. Anxiety spreads the way a virus spreads. It's highly contagious, and the only antidote is a leader who is able to walk into an anxious situation with calm presence, in what I'd say theologically, is incarnational presence. And that's how you can deescalate a room. And so, whatever group, whether it's a family or a staff or an entire country, we all catch each other's anxiety. Social media is a virus spreader. So, I know one of the things they're studying with COVID is the super spreaders. Twitter and Facebook is a super spreader of chronic anxiety. We're all catching it from each other, so that's why we're anxious. And then, I feel like I'm going on a little, Carey, but I'll just quickly mention, and feel free to pick apart where you want-

Carey Nieuwhof:

No, this is rich. Keep going.

Steve Cuss:

There's two other sources of anxieties. A legitimate one is acute anxiety, and that is an actual real threat. It's not a perceived threat. It's not like, "Well, this person doesn't like me," it's actual life and death is going on. Our family got the news yesterday that somebody... My wife used to teach... Their mother died of COVID. And then, that final category would be grief, which is related to anxiety but is a different thing.

Steve Cuss:

So, what what our leaders can do is they can take the tangled mess of anxiety, and they can take some time every day to detangle it so it's not this overwhelming thing that has us in its grip. And we can start to notice things. When a group's getting anxious, we can start to notice when we're getting anxious, and then we can start to figure out, "Am I grieving?" because that's different. Now, obviously...

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, I want to get to grieving. Don't want me to miss that.

Steve Cuss:

Yeah, yeah. So, these are deep things and this is long work, but this is how we can start.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I want to go back to a phrase you've used a few times. I don't know whether it originally goes back to Edwin Friedman, but the idea of nonanxious presence. And I did a teaching in a course I did called How to Lead in Crisis, which nobody really knows how to lead in crisis. I just did the best that I did. I could pull together and tried to help some leaders with it. But I did some research around Friedman and looked at what he said in his book, Failure of Nerve-

Steve Cuss:

Failure of Nerve, yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

... which is where I think he coined that phrase. And it means something very different. When I heard it quoted just as soundbites... We live in a soundbite culture, a Twitter culture. I thought it meant kind of a zen presence, but that's not what he means at all. So, can you define what you mean when you say, the leader walks into the room, you have that really anxious elder, that really anxious executive pastor or groups person who's like freaking out on you, and how do you disentangle yourself from that?

Steve Cuss:

Great. Great question. Yep. There's two tools, and it's like going to the gym. So, when you first start using the tools, you feel a bit out of shape, but you can build these muscles. The first thing any leader can do is they can pay as much attention to process as they are to content. So, content is what we're saying, so you and I right now are trading content. Process is the way that you and I are really relating to each other. And if a leader pays as much attention to process as they do to content, they can deescalate the anxiety in the room.

Steve Cuss:

So, what that looks like is, when you're in a staff meeting, you're not just concerned about the agenda, who's doing what, who's saying what, you're watching, "Who never speaks up? Who, after they speak, makes everyone afraid? Whose anxiety has spilled into others?" So, that's number one, because what Friedman and his coach, Murray Bowen, would say, is that people listen to content, but we react emotionally to process.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, okay.

Steve Cuss:

The process is this thing under the surface that we're all reacting to that we're not naming, but any leader can walk into any room and start noticing process right away. And once you do it, it'll freak you

out because you'll start seeing things that you've always known but you've never known how to put a word to it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Can you give me a couple of other examples of process? I get the idea of the person who never speaks up or the person makes everyone else feel anxious. What are some other... Because I think that's a really good point. How do you observe process?

Steve Cuss:

Yeah. You observe the way people relate to each other and the way you are affected by other people and the way you affect other people. So, several years ago-

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, that person makes me feel defensive or-

Steve Cuss:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay.

Steve Cuss:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. So, several years ago, I'm a young lead pastor, we're a young church plant of 200, and I don't really know what I'm doing. And we hired this brand new staff member, she's barely been a believer not very long, concrete-minded person, very earnest. And I'm the kind of person that's an external processor. I need to talk a lot to figure out what I think. I'm also the kind of person that sounds like I have strong opinions when I really don't. I need to generate a lot of ideas, and most of them are bad. A classic entrepreneurial leader.

Steve Cuss:

I'm spit balling in a staff meeting, there's like four of us in the staff, and she takes out her notebook and she starts earnestly writing down everything I'm saying like I'm the Pope, like it's all an edict. And I remember stopping, "What are you doing?" And she's writing it down like this is what she has to do this week. Whereas, my veteran staff, they know that in a few weeks I'll forget that I even talked about it. That's process. I am concerned as a leader, I don't want to exacerbate a good staff member by the shadow side of my entrepreneurialism infecting her. Because the other thing I'm aware of is I'm the lead pastor, I have a lot of authority whether I feel it or not, whether I... I know, like Andy Stanley famously says, that the leader's words have 50 pound weights attached to them. That was the first time I noticed that.

Steve Cuss:

So, process is paying attention to my impact on others and their impact on me, and then nonanxious presence, which is a technical term out of family systems theory. Anyone could Google it and get along way. Nonanxious presence is the ability to stop someone else's anxiety infecting me and to stop my anxiety infecting someone else in any given moment. So, I love how you said it, it's not about being Yoda

or some kind of zen person. I can walk into a room anxious but be a nonanxious presence by being aware of my anxiety. One of my great tools is naming it. Sometimes I name it to God before I walk in. Sometimes I'll name it to the room. I'll just say, "Boy, I'm carrying this thing right now. I just want to name it to get some power over it."

Steve Cuss:

But a true nonanxious presence is the ability and the skill to not let others' anxiety and affect you. Like if you have a phantom mob coming your way or people are ganging up, or you get that critical email, and you're stood up. It's the ability to manage it rather than infect others with it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay. You talked a little bit about understanding your emotions and how you're feeling and the sources of your anxiety. It sounds like a lot of this is self-awareness and then some self-regulation, which is not a surprise because that's the heart of emotional intelligence. But you mentioned naming feelings. So, I was terrible at that, and I'm still learning how to name feelings. And it can get really difficult. I mean, a daily discipline, even this morning I was trying to figure out, as we go through this whole COVID thing, I mentioned to you before we started recording, this is the week where after two and a half weeks of siege mode, I'm starting to feel it. It's like I've slowed down a little bit, and my body's going, "Uh-oh, there's a lot going on." And it took me about an hour to untangle. It's like, "Oh, I'm feeling a loss of control." Now, I taugth on loss of control, but to actually have that show up in my own life is very different. How do you start to disentangle leadership anxiety and how.... is naming emotions and what are some other processes that are really good to help you do that?

Steve Cuss:

Yeah. It's such a great question. I think it's such a vital question for every leader to address. I believe the lowest hanging fruit way to know you're anxious is to get hyper aware of your physiology. Anxiety typically shows up in a spinning mind, a racing heart or a tightening body, and it's different for each of us. So, for me, it's the spinning mind. I know I'm anxious when I'm ruminating over and over again about the same thing. For others, racing heart, it feels like they've had 10 cups of caffeine. And then, for others, it's a tightening clench in either their gut, they feel nauseous, or their shoulders. They always need a back rub. Let me throw it to you, Carey, would you be able to name where it starts for you?

Carey Nieuwhof:

I would say racing heart.

Steve Cuss:

Racing heart?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Isn't that interesting? Because I hadn't heard that before. Thanks for the free therapy, by the way, and thanks everyone for listening in. No, I would say because I sleep almost every night, it has to be almost a nuclear meltdown to interrupt my sleep. And the COVID crisis, particularly because I had six to 12 months of speaking wiped out, it's like, "Oh my gosh, what's going on here?" I was up at 4:30 in the morning, but I slept every night and it was 10 minutes getting to sleep as opposed to two, which would be my typical pattern. But it did show up as heightened awareness, like almost like, "Okay, it's time to do this, and it's time to do that." Hyperproductivity, not manic productivity but hyperproductivity,

reassuring everyone else, just like, "Okay." It's like an adrenaline shot. It was like every day I woke up at 4:30 and someone injected me with some adrenaline, and I just went-

Steve Cuss:

Tightening body.

Carey Nieuwhof:

... what was the third? You mentioned racing mind. Oh, tightened?

Steve Cuss:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. A little bit. A little bit. I would feel that. I'm very sensitive to my body, and I would feel in my shoulders and my neck that it was getting tight. Not to the point where I needed to go get a massage, but that's where it would show up in me.

Steve Cuss:

Yeah. Yeah. So, I would say that is step one, is for people, the whole first take your impulse idea. Some of this work only takes 30 seconds. That's what I love about it is they are-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, but I wouldn't call it anxiety because I didn't feel anxious, but of course, that's probably exactly what it is. Right?

Steve Cuss:

Well, Carey, gosh, I mean, I'm so careful not exposing people. I think what you could do, if you're interested in a brave experiment, is to ask your team when they know you're anxious in times that you don't know. That would be a second tool is that hyperproductivity is almost certainly an anxious response on some level, but where it gets complicated is it's also the shadow side of your incredible gift. You have generated all of these phenomenal resources for church leaders, the kingdom's benefit.

PART 2 OF 4 ENDS [00:46:04]

Steve Cuss:

So every gift has a shadow side. I just believe that chronic anxiety is a spiritual force that for most leaders we don't know we're anxious until we're really, really anxious. And what I'm interested in doing with the coaching I do is helping people go from being deep down the grip of anxiety, to learning how to notice it in the moment, to now being able to preempt it as they're walking into a situation.

Steve Cuss:

So in my chaplaincy work, there was that year when I first started to understand, I believe the lie, I need to have the answer. But I didn't know that until well after the event. Now 20 something years later, I can walk into an elders meeting. Elders meet once a month. They're phenomenal men and women, but they're volunteers and they're not in it everyday like I am, and so they might ask a question that they

have every right to ask that I don't have the answer to. If I believe the lie that I need to have the answer and I'm not dealing with it, I'm going to be defensive when they ask, I'm going to tell them why that isn't in their purview and they shouldn't be asking. I'll have all these weird responses but because I'm very aware that some of my anxiety is driven by needing to always know, I can actually die to it before I get to the elders meeting. That's just a way of preempting.

Steve Cuss:

So I really think the first place to start for most leaders is your body. Just if you can start to notice when you're in the grip of anxiety, what does it feel like? The next step is are you able to name, what you think you need that you don't really need. Like, and then after that the braver work is asking people who love you when they know when you don't know. And I'll say this, Carey, my youngest is 13 now. My oldest is 19. You haven't lived until your 9-year-old daughter is telling you that she knows you're anxious when you don't know you're anxious.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, wow.

Steve Cuss:

But that's because we all catch each other's anxiety. That's because we all notice and react to process even though we don't talk about it much. So those would be just a few steps I think we could take.

Carey Nieuwhof:

No, that's really good. I want to ask you, so one of the words that hasn't come up a lot in our interview so far, but I kind of wonder if we're dancing around the edge of, is fear. To what extent, because you know if you don't know the answer, that can be a fear thing. If you didn't do a good job preaching, that could be a fear thing. If you're like, "Well, I can't do nothing, I've got to do something." That can be a fear thing. Is this related in any way to fear?

Steve Cuss:

I love that. I love that question. Yeah. You are obviously well versed in the things you're asking about, right? Like the most commanded passage and scriptures, fear not. So I think when John says, "Perfect love casts out all fear," I think the way it works is we can easily be in the grip of chronic anxiety or we can be in the grip of the unconditional love of God. It is very difficult to be in the grip of both. One of them typically displaces the other one. I think that's because theologically chronic anxiety is actually what shows up when we're depending on anything other than God for our wellbeing, and so I think anxiety becomes a real gift because it can now be the early trigger that we need to encounter the gospel in the moment. Like most church leaders I know, we're much better at sharing the gospel than we are experiencing it for ourselves. It's one of the great challenges of church leadership, but since I've been doing this work I've experienced the profound unconditional love of God so much deeper as I noticed my chronic anxiety.

Steve Cuss:

One of the signs that you know you're anxious is when you believe the lie "It's all on me." You start to forget that God's at work, that God's sovereign, and you start operating as if you must do something. One exercise I do is I just make a little two-beat reminder. When I start to notice that I'm feeling it all on my shoulders, and particularly for leaders who are highly responsible people we're particularly prone to

this. I must do, I must do that thing. Just that simple reminder wait a minute, God is with me. I'm not alone, but not only that, God is actually already at work into the ambiguity into which I'm walking. That thing that I'm walking into that I don't know what to do, God's already there.

Steve Cuss:

This was profound for me as a chaplain. There would be times I'd be doing these overnight shifts and I'd go to five to seven deaths in a day. Like 2 AM the beeper goes off and it's the fifth death, and I just remember being, I'm not proud of this, but this is a very human response, I'd be angry at the person for dying for inconveniencing me.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, yeah. No pastor has ever felt that before.

Steve Cuss:

Right, right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Keep going.

Steve Cuss:

And so I have from the overnight room to washing my face, brushing my teeth, trying to get some semblance of being awake at 2 AM. I've got from there to when I walk into the widower, maybe his wife just died, and this poor man. The worst thing that's ever happened in his life has just happened, and I'm mad at him. That's an anxious response. That anger, that's my emotions in my body pushing away the fear of can I really be in the presence of grief again? But what was phenomenally profound for me was remembering wait a minute, God's already in the room with that widower. God's already doing work. God doesn't need me to do anything. What God is inviting me to do is to join God in that work, pay attention to what's going on, where's God at work, and then act out of that. And that's what I would encourage in COVID.

Steve Cuss:

I just think we are in a historically unprecedented time. Not only had none of us ever been in this, but certainly in modern history this is unprecedented. This is a time for leaders to be even more kind to ourselves. Carey, what if your listeners were at least as kind to ourselves as God is to us. Wouldn't that be a radical idea?

Carey Nieuwhof:

That would be the amazing.

Steve Cuss:

Yeah, because when we're harsher on ourselves than God is, we are actually putting ourselves above God. So this is a time for extra kindness, but this is also a time just to name what's going on and what we're feeling, and what we will find is we have a deeper capacity to walk into ambiguity, we'll have a deeper capacity to walk into an anxious group of people who have every reason to be anxious. I talked to a member of my congregation a week and a half ago. He laid off a thousand people in a day. He is



absolutely destroyed. And my ability to take care of him is wholly dependent on my ability to not shrink his pain down to a manageable size, but to enter into his pain, to name it, to pray with him, to be present to what God's doing. That the vision I'm casting.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, yeah, because that takes us into sort of where I was thinking the next question is which is leadership is action and leadership really has a bias toward action. If you look at the leaders, we mostly admire the leaders who accomplish something with their lives. They tend to be active rather than passive. So how do you balance that? That thing of not needing too much of you in the moment because it's an anxious response to just sitting on the couch eating Doritos, binging on Netflix while the world goes into flames, because I think that is the fear in a lot of leaders' minds. It's like so you're telling me not act, but if I don't act I'm not exercising leadership. So how do you straddle that?

Steve Cuss:

That's a great question. I'm so aware on a podcast like this that getting into the nuance is a challenge and so all I'm calling for, because I'm also an action-oriented leader...

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, me too. Big time.

Steve Cuss:

... when I'm under stress I want to do something and I want to capture. I know we said it before, that is a gift. It's a gift that God's given you. I'm not saying not to act, I'm simply saying pause before acting and get aware of what actions are you doing for others and what actions are you doing to manage your own anxiety? And if you're not aware when you're anxious, that's when it gets dangerous is when you're not aware that you're anxious... Carey, it must be the same. My email intake has probably increased five fold from church resource organizations trying to help. These are all great organizations. They're all great organizations. But if I am not careful, I'll exhaust myself on the fallacy of more information.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. They've got a webinar every day, every hour, for the next year.

Steve Cuss:

That's right. Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You're totally right.

Steve Cuss:

And not only that, but some of those organizations, and again I'm not judging, but some of them are simply trying to figure out how to keep their business alive, which is a completely legitimate concern, but they're not actually trying to help necessarily, they're trying to do more and that could be an anxious response. So I'm not saying let's all just kind of wait and hope for the best. I'm just saying in ambiguous times when no one quite knows what to do, digging a deeper well of your own self awareness is going to get you more productive than just doing, doing, doing. I think that would be my...

Carey Nieuwhof:

What are the disciplines that help you find that time for self-reflection? Maybe silence. Are there some rhythms that can really help leaders in a time of crisis to not lose their footing and to drill down on these issues? Any advice there?

Steve Cuss:

Yeah. I do think whatever spiritual practices connect you to Jesus, do more of those. And it is different for each of us as for some people it's silence. For some it's solitude. For me, I encourage leaders in my coaching to do a life-giving list. You can actually download it off my website. It's just a free spreadsheet, and it's a simple list of the people and the geographical locations which currently you can't do with COVID, but the people and the activities that make you feel like a kid in God's kingdom.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow.

Steve Cuss:

So I have a life-giving list. There's like 70-something things on the list, and some of these things are free and some of them cost a lot of money, and so geographical places, people, activities. And I was noticing in my own life, Carey, I was relating to God more as God's employee than God's child. I was clocking in for the boss, a boss that I love, a boss that's very good to me...

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, good boss.

Steve Cuss:

... but still, well done, good and faithful servant. That was my mantra and I realized wait a minute, Jesus said that the father gives good gifts to his kids. And so I would ask your listeners this: When you hear the gifts of God, that phrase, when you hear God gives gifts, if your first thought is the spiritual gifts that he gave me to pass on to others, I would encourage you in this time to make a list of the gifts that God has only given to you and no one else.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow.

Steve Cuss:

So I'll give you a few on my list. My wife, Lisa.. God has given me my wife in a way that no one else gets to get, and I get to finish this podcast right when we're done and I get to go up and hug my wife, and that's a unique gift from God. That is a gift to me and it's unbelievable. I play acoustic guitar and so one of the things I do, Carey, is I'll displace my anxiety and the pressure with five minutes of James Taylor or U2, or whatever. I just enjoy playing it. I love to sing and I'm not a good singer so I never sing in public, but I just sit.

Steve Cuss:

The last time I did it was yesterday. I got out the guitar. I sang a James Taylor song because I think when we practice the gifts that God has given us as God's child, we are free from earnestness and we get to

play. And I think the fallacy in our leaders is we think there's too much important work to do but you referenced Ed Friedman. He is actually extremely playful. He actually models playfulness, and I would just say to our leaders it's phenomenal what five minutes to 20 minutes of playfulness can get you. That'll buy you three to seven hours of productivity. But one of the ways you know you're anxious is when you're applying "try harder" to anything that's not working.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh yeah, yeah.

Steve Cuss:

If something's not working and your solution is more of the same and try harder... maybe you do have that employee that's not very productive and you really do believe that one more meeting is going to turn the corner, one more piece of insight from you. The life-giving list is just a dead-simple way to displace your pressure with the presence of God.

Carey Nieuwhof:

We will link to that in the show notes, and I'm probably going to download that. That sounds really, really good. You know on the other side of burnout and I want to drill down on burnout in just a moment. I realized I was thinking of my hobby.

Steve Cuss:

Jump in, Carey. What would be on your list? I think because we all have different things on our list. What would be a couple of things on your list?

Carey Nieuwhof:

So a few things I really enjoy. I actually really enjoy barbecue. I'm going to do some tonight. That was a hobby. You can't pay me money for it. Everyone thinks I'm sponsored by Big Green Egg. I'm not, and that would ruin it. So I love doing that. I love bringing pleasure to other people. I really enjoy cycling. Went for a bike ride an hour before we jumped on this call and that's just... I don't ride in groups usually. It's just me, and it's stuff that helps me feel God's pleasure. I've taken up running. What else? I mean, my wife for sure. Hanging out with my kids. Long dinners with friends. But that whole idea where I realized so much of leadership is giving and there are rewards in it. It's deeply rewarding, but a friendship in life has to be mutual and that is where you receive and you give. And often in leadership I found myself in a deficit in that area where you're giving, giving, giving, but not receiving. And so I've really tried to focus on that. Is that in the ballpark?

Steve Cuss:

Oh fantastic. Yeah. And it is interesting how specific it gets for my wife, because spouses can do this for each other and your kids can make a life-giving list, too. So my wife, for example, popping old-school popcorn on the stove is on her life-giving list. Our executive pastor, Tom, every Saturday morning he puts on a vinyl album and he posts the vinyl on Facebook. Here's what makes it magic. I used to be embarrassed to teach this because it feels so basic, but I just find so many leaders don't do it. God has given all of us these unique pleasures, and every time I do something on the life-giving list I just thank God for it. So if I were barbecuing like you, Carey, there'd be a moment where I would just in prayer say, "God, thank you that you have wired me to love barbecue and love serving people with it. That's a gift

from you, and I receive it." And it's crazy. There's something, because I really don't think you can be invaded by the love of God and invaded by chronic anxiety at the same time.

Steve Cuss:

So I tend to use my life-giving list to displace my anxiety and my leadership pressure, and the spiritual disciplines are on the list. So for me reading theology, reading the Old Testament slowly is on my list. For me, solitude more than silence. It's crazy. I started going to a Benedictine monastery several years ago. They do silent retreats and they chant in Gregorian chant seven times a day and I don't know how, but it's one of the things on my list. It's the most peace-flooding experience to go chant with these cloistered nuns. So the things that will show up on your list are crazy. You keep looking for them, you keep adding, and I think it helps a leader feel more alive.

Steve Cuss:

So I really want to hammer on it's not about sitting back. It's actually about deepening our capacity for ambiguity, which is the times we're in. It grows our ability to manage ambiguous situations when we are less anxious.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Good to know. I will be downloading that list for sure and sharing it with friends, Steve. Okay. I know by the time this airs there's some leaders who are like, "Okay, I'm anxious. I'm stressed. I wonder if I'm burning out." And I want to get this right. You make the argument that burnout has less to do with workload and more to do with internal and external anxiety. Can you explain that a little bit, because you're right. The stereotype on burnout is I just worked too many hours. I've got too much responsibility. But you think it's anxiety related?

Steve Cuss:

Yes, I do. Yes. I think the too-many-hours fallacy, people are working too many hours because they are living out of their anxiety. They believe that they need something or the world needs something that they don't really need and the world doesn't really need. So most leaders believe that the world needs 80 hours of our time when 65 will do. The other fallacy I'd say, Carey, almost every leader I know and respect loves having a lot of work to do. It's like a...

Carey Nieuwhof:

I don't thrive at 38.5 hours a week. I don't.

Steve Cuss:

That's right. I know in my life I get lazy and there's a certain point that I actually get lazy and dysfunctional. Like a boat, I kind of need to be on the plane, but a boat is kind of in the water, but then it gets on the water.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh yeah. A boat. Yeah. On a plane. Absolutely.

Steve Cuss:

Thank you. Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So like captivity right now in quarantine with everyone else.

Steve Cuss:

So you talk about a life-giving list. A day out on...

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, a life-giving list. Boating. Yeah. Totally. 100% for me. Again, the guy who had no hobbies finally has some.

Steve Cuss:

There you go.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I'm with you.

Steve Cuss:

Yeah. So no, most leaders I know they love to have a lot to do and we actually get motivated by being productive, but it's usually that one person that's always critical. Like for me, I came close to burnout at our church. We had a slate of young men dying in our church year after year, and they were all dear friends of mine. One was the chairman of our elders, one was my volunteer worship leader. They were these men that were very precious to me as friends and key leaders in the church. The burnout there had more to do with grief than workload. It had more to do with the pressure of burying a friend on Sunday and then leading a church through grief when I was grieving.

Steve Cuss:

So yeah, it's usually got more to do with unaddressed expectations about ourselves. Maybe your church isn't growing, your company isn't growing the way it was before, and you don't know if you have what it takes. Maybe it's because you believe imposter syndrome that you actually have finally been exposed. That's usually what makes a leader burn out or worse, have an affair or some of those really toxic responses that unfortunately we see too many leaders doing.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, that resonates with me the way you describe it, too, because I can just think of dozens of people I know who burned out. You remove the workload, but the burnout continues, right? You take them out of their job and it's not like, "Oh, I feel so much better on Monday." It's like sometimes it gets worse, right?

Steve Cuss:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay. Well, let's go back to grief. So I pick these amateur points up along the way, but I've heard depression is loss, grief is loss. There's a lot to grieve. If you think about how much people have lost,

whether that is control, income, the collective loss of life, even if you don't have anybody in your immediate circle. I mean, there's just a national loss. There's regional loss. There's a loss of freedom, a loss of mobility, the loss of dreams, the loss of hopes. I mean church planters and business leaders who are hoping to launch brand new locations lost it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

How does grief show up? How does that kind of mourning of loss show up in leaders' lives? And I want to go back to something you said before we hit record because you and I were sort of comparing notes. We're on week four of the crisis as we're recording this in early April, so this'll air a few weeks later. But I'm like yeah, I'm really feeling it this week. And you said your mood is all over the place, right? Like when you look at how that kind of came out. So can you help us to pay attention to the signs that would tell us we're grieving or we're experiencing loss or depression?

Steve Cuss:

Yeah. Grief is the bane of most leaders because we are so control oriented that the antidote to grief is radical acceptance, and it's a different skillset than most leaders have. Most leaders are leading toward a preferred future, right? We have a vision of how things can be, but if you just picture grief like grief is a thing. It has its own agenda. It didn't ask you if you're okay with it. So the metaphor I use for grief is it's a tornado. It shows up. Sometimes you get an early warning siren, sometimes it comes unannounced, it outstays its welcome, it does its damage, and then it moves on. And I think the challenge with grief is that process can happen anywhere from multiple times a day. If you are actually literally grieving the loss, the death of someone you love, that process happens thousands and thousands of times over 10-15 years. That's the problem with grief is when we had these young men dying in our church, I remember one of the young widows, a dear, dear friend of our families, I remember her saying to us, she's like, "Year five was the worst. I thought like year three was the worst," and that's the nature of grief. It sets its own agenda.

Steve Cuss:

And so I think the antidote for a leader is radical acceptance.

PART 3 OF 4 ENDS [01:09:04]

Steve Cuss:

Because when we're in an ambiguous environment that we have no control over, just our need to shrink it down to something we can manage and lead through, and it usually, Carey, it really does come from a good place. We have a good heart, we want to be helpful to people. We want to help our team. What's it like when you are the leader of a team and you're the one grieving the most?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yes.

Steve Cuss:

That's so disorienting because you don't want to infect your team. Now, Colin Powell talks about how optimism is a force multiplier, but for your listeners who are struggling to get up, I think you were really perceptive when you said, we're about to hit the ground zero for a lot of leaders because they've been running so hard. Yeah. This last week for me, what I was sharing with you before we hit record, I'm, by

just nature and disposition, highly optimistic. Very, very little gets me down. And last week, I'd wake up in a foreign experience that I'd have to describe as a depression. I started to question my calling at the church. And then one day, I woke up just incredibly, almost paranoid. It was like an irritability that bordered on a paranoia about people. These, for me, are incredibly foreign experiences.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right.

Steve Cuss:

I just am not wired that way. And so, I would just say, because I've done this work a lot, I moved into radical self-acceptance, which is naming it and then I did deeper tools. I was probably less productive last week and more forgiving of myself than I normally would be. And then I decided, okay, next week, we're in trouble if it's that way this week again. And this week, I'm feeling well and I don't know why. That's the nature of grief.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I've had a good friend who's a CEO who texted me on the weekend and just said, "I've never had this before." He's in his early 40s and he's just like, "I feel lost. I feel almost depressed. What is this?" And so, we had a good conversation about it and away we go, but this will... The loss that we're experiencing, the anxiety, the grief, that's just going to show up in really weird ways, isn't it?

Steve Cuss:

Yeah, that's right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And I think I had a little bit of that earlier today where I was really kind of in a foul mood for no reason. I had a good night's sleep, the sun was shining, I had a good day of work ahead of me and I'm like, I just wanted to criticize my wife, and she did absolutely nothing to deserve it. And I'm thinking about it, praying about it, and I'm like, "Oh, I just need something to control right now." And so, I'm going to try to control someone with my words and criticism. And once I named it, it took me a while to get to the bottom of it, I'm like, "That's what that is." And then it was gone. Right?

Steve Cuss:

Oh, interesting. It's a great example. Curt Thompson says we name things to tame things. And I think that vision and scripture about confession...

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yes.

Steve Cuss:

The fact that you have to say it to somebody in order for it to lose its grip on you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's a good point. You're right.

Steve Cuss:

Yeah, you had to say it out loud.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That was a form of confession. I went into her office and I just said, "Hey, you don't even know this is going on, but here's what was going on, and here's the point of it." And you know?

Steve Cuss:

And then the power of it loosened in your life. That's the magic of it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, it just releases. You bring the darkness into light and...

Steve Cuss:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

The darkness loses. So, I hear that. Any other words for leaders who may be suspecting that they're burning out right now?

Steve Cuss:

Oh, man. But Carey, burnout is one of the scariest situations for a leader. I think it's terrifying. So, I just think... I know this is your message over and over again. Don't do it alone. There are people in your life who love you, and go be vulnerable with those people. On my life-giving list is some dear closest friends of mine that are in ministry. And sometimes, I'll call them and I'll just blurt it all out. "Hey, I'm really struggling and I'm calling you because I really need help." And other times, I'm all kind of casual-like, like, "Hey, how you doing?" But I need them. So, I think, get help, name it.

Steve Cuss:

But I think the other message I'd want to say, Carey, is burnout is not inevitable.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yes.

Steve Cuss:

And if you do burn out, there is so much good news on the other side. I do think one of the things we... I know we've covered a lot of ground today, but one of the most powerful ways to really encounter the grace of God is dying to something. And I do think burnout starts to send us a message of our ambitions and our productivity and even our income, like it's all going to go away, and it's all because of you. And those messages of doom, that to me, is why chronic anxiety is a spiritual dark force. It always sends you a message of doom, but the gospel always has a message of hope. And I don't mean it in a simplistic way and I don't mean it in a pithy way. I mean, the gospel's message of hope. I mean, you and I recording this right before Resurrection Sunday.



Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Steve Cuss:

There is always a resurrection on the other side of death, and we can follow Jesus through that once we die to what we think we need. And so, for some leaders, burnout might actually be the best thing that happens to you. I personally hope you don't ever go through it because it is awful.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, I would vouch for that.

Steve Cuss:

But if you do go through it or if you are going through it, there is gospel on the other side of it. There is hope.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, I never would have believed it, but there is much greater life on the other side of burnout than there was on the front side of burnout. For sure.

Steve Cuss:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Ah, Steve, one or two quick little questions for you left. I want to speak to the optimists in the crowd. You say you're an optimist. I'm an optimist. But it's interesting, on social media, just with some friends and some people I follow online, there's almost at first, it's like, "This Coronavirus is all overblown" and "no, this is good" and "faith over fear." And listen, I believe in faith over fear too. But there are some people who almost, it seems their way of coping is to minimize what's going on and to say, "You've got this, it's going to be okay." They're going to motivate themselves through the crisis. What is the upside of that and is there a downside to that?

Steve Cuss:

Okay, I'm having trouble hearing any upside to what you just said.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I am too, but I wanted to give it the benefit of the doubt. I'm like, "Are you trying to talk this through in public? Are you trying to motivate yourself? There's a... I'm a Stockdale paradox guy. Jim Collins writes about, you never lose hope, but you confront the brutal facts. That's also my Enneagram eight. I'm like, "Okay, guys, things are bad. The house is on fire. Everyone out. Let's figure out how we can put out the fire." So, when I'm watching these hyper-optimists sort of go on online, almost minimizing what's going on, I'm like, I don't know how that's helping anybody.

Steve Cuss:

No, I think they're just actually, I'll be... It's always risky to make blanket statements, right? And generalizations.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, go ahead.

Steve Cuss:

All right, sure. Generally speaking, they're just operating out of their own unaddressed anxiety. They're unaware that that's what they're doing because they need to... When people do that kind of pithy, bumper sticker type.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, it's almost pithy, right.

Steve Cuss:

Right, that that bumper sticker, if it fits on a bumper sticker, I'm going to give it to you, that idea, that's... What they're not aware of is they're simply incapable of stepping into someone's pain. But I think there's a whole side of leadership that's incarnational presence, and that is entering right in the middle of it with people. And the only way you can do that is when you're aware of yourself. Otherwise, you're going to do damage. And it is crazy how oftentimes, I'm a... I love scripture. I find so much life in scripture, but the amount of times a leader will quote a scripture to somebody and they think it's helpful, and if you're a leader with authority over someone, that person will even thank you for it.

Steve Cuss:

They'll even say, "Oh, thank you, pastor, that really helped." No, it didn't. You are simply shrinking their pain so you could manage and feel better. What's it like to be aware of that? To stop and to simply say to somebody, "That must be really hard." Like when I talk to my friend who had laid off all those people, I cannot begin to imagine what he's carrying, and that's all I could offer him. I said, "I don't know what it must be like to be you. I've never had to do that. That must be the worst possible for you. You must feel so terrible." He's like, and I remember he said, "I'm the cause of all these people..." I'm like, call him Bob, that "Bob, you're not the cause. The virus is what caused this." But I'm not saying, "You know what? Look on the bright side, maybe they'll get a better job." That's that pivot.

Steve Cuss:

You can still bring gospel hope into someone's life without shrinking down their pain. And I think that's the difference, particularly for your listeners who may not be aware. Again, Carey, they can ask people who love them and their loved ones, if they're safe people, their loved ones will tell them, "Oh, yeah, you're not someone I go to when I'm hurting because I know you're going to just give them"-

Carey Nieuwhof:

You're a minimizer, you're an optimist.

Steve Cuss:

Or you're going to give me some advice. So, yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. Isn't that interesting? It's like the book of Job, right? The best thing his friends did was sit there for a few days and say nothing, and then it kind of went all downhill from there. But when I read Job, I kind of agree with his friends. Then I'm like, "Oh, yeah, but God didn't." So, yeah, it's a fascinating book.

Steve Cuss:

You and I were chatting about Henry Cloud. I was recently on a Compassion International trip with Henry. Just an incredible-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, I heard about that trip.

Steve Cuss:

Oh, incredible privilege. And he made this throwaway comment. I hope he doesn't mind me sharing it on your podcast, I don't think he does, he's like, "Yeah, when you read through the"-

Carey Nieuwhof:

He'll correct it if you... I'm sure it's great.

Steve Cuss:

Oh, if you need to ask him about it. He said, "Hey, if you read through the book of Job, it's like walking through a Christian bookstore."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, yeah. That's simple answers for complicated problems.

Steve Cuss:

Right? Or categorized. Wrong theology or wrong behavior is why you're in this problem. Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, I think he'd stand by that. That's absolutely... Wow. That's so true. Steve, this has been life-giving, and we will link to the life-giving list. I'm very, very anxious to see what's on that, and I think that's really good advice. Anything else in closing that you want to share with leaders, Steve? This has been so rich.

Steve Cuss:

Oh, this has been just an honor, Carey, to come on. And I just think you're one of the... You've been doing this a long time and you're one of the people that is worth hearing from, with what's going on. So, thank you, thanks for hosting me.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yes, I'm working on my anxiety. That's one of the things that actually really resonated with me. But it's so funny because I was recording a video and today wasn't one of my best days. And I'm like on take three. Then, I just had this moment where I thought, because I'm running this IGTV series on Instagram that's got just tens of thousands of views now. I'm like, "Who am I doing this for?" And I said, "I think I'm

producing content just to help content." I shut my camera off and I just walked away and I said, "Today's not going to be a video day. It's fine." I don't know if it's health or what, but.

Steve Cuss:

I love, that makes me so happy. I've often coached leaders. We think about Sabbath as rest and particularly for leaders that are productive, I coach them to consider Sabbath through the lens of control. There's a whole theology in the Bible about how Sabbath is about control, not rest, so.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, I think there's a whole other podcast episode in that, Steve. We'll have to have you back. That is my issue for sure. This is great. So, people are going to want to connect with you. The book, your latest book is called *Managing Leadership Anxiety: Yours and Theirs*. Good for peace time, excellent for crisis time as well. You've helped a lot of leaders manage their anxiety and what they're feeling. Where can people find you online?

Steve Cuss:

Yeah, my last name's Cuss, might as well have fun with it, so my website is [SteveCussWords.com](http://SteveCussWords.com), and you can get some free tools there. I'm on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. I'm currently most active with this work on Twitter, and I'm trying to do better on the other. My other platforms are more personal. People can follow me any way they like. But that's how you... And then, I have my own podcast too, Carey. I bring guests on and I make them talk about anxiety. It's a good time, and that's just called *Managing Leadership Anxiety Podcast*, so people can scroll through the guests. Max Lucado has been on there, Kay Warren has been on there, and Christine Caine's episode will probably be released by the time people get this, so.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, that's awesome. Well, you've helped a lot of leaders today. And Steve, thank you so, so much. I know this won't be the last time we talk.

Steve Cuss:

Aw, great, Carey, it's been a real privilege. Thank you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, that was personally therapeutic. I kind of like getting people like Steve and Ian Morgan Cron, who's coming back on the podcast, because I feel like I get free therapy. I don't know. Maybe you did too. There is a lot more in the show notes at [CareyNieuwhof.com/Episode337](http://CareyNieuwhof.com/Episode337). We even have transcripts, if you want to go a little bit deeper, some quotes you can share on social media plus some insights from the episode. You'll get everything, plus all the links we mentioned as well over at [CareyNieuwhof.com/Episode337](http://CareyNieuwhof.com/Episode337). And while tens of thousands of people will hear this episode, thousands, sometimes about 10,000 people will head on over to the show notes. If you've never done that, you don't know what you're missing. Got a lot of good stuff for you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Coming up on the show, we have got Tim Keller, which I'm so excited for. Sean Morgan is coming up, Annie F. Downs, Joel Manby, Ian Morgan Cron, Scott Harrison from *Charity: Water*, Paula Faris from ABC

News, Nir Eyal, who really rocked Silicon Valley a few years ago with some of his books. Jo Saxton, John Eldredge, Patrick Lencioni, and so many more, subscribers. You get it all for free, so if you haven't yet subscribed, hit the subscribe button. And if you'd leave a rating and review, I'd be so grateful. We've got What I'm Thinking About coming up in just a few minutes, but in the meantime, let me tee up the next episode.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Sean Morgan is someone who's become a really good friend, and we had a fascinating conversation about what he learned in the military about navigating crisis and uncertainty. So, have a listen.

Sean Morgan:

Because of the military, here's where the military comes in. So, I think there's this opportunity mindset, and we probably don't talk about it enough in the ministry space, but the aspect of warfare. And the truth is, if you're in charge, if you're placed in charge, you're stewarding that. But if you're in those positions, you have this... Okay, opportunity is a great word to use. But from a warrior's perspective, you almost have a responsibility. If you put somebody in charge, and you train and develop them and you give them a weapon and it's wartime, they don't just have an opportunity to go do something. They almost have a responsibility.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's next episode, coming up May 5th. We're back to our regular schedule, but not our regular program. We took a lot of the spring interviews and moved them into the summer, and we're just bringing you crisis stuff right now because that's what we're all in. So, I am thinking about what happens when we try to go back to normal, whatever that looks like.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And hey, this is brought to you by The Ascent Leader co-horts. If you are thinking of stepping out of your senior leadership role in the next five to 10 years or sooner, apply for co-hort at [TheAscentLeader.org](http://TheAscentLeader.org). And what happens when your 2020 budget just blew up? You pick up their complimentary book and support hotline at Generis by going to [Generis.com/Carey2020](http://Generis.com/Carey2020).

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, here's What I'm Thinking About. We are all talking about what reopening America, the world looks like, Canada. And what is that like? And I've got something I'm kind of worried about, which is simply this. So many leaders, and particularly church leaders, are poised to re-embrace a model of ministry or a model of business designed to reach a world that no one exists because you want to get back to normal. It's like, "Oh, finally, we're back in our building or back in the office. Things can go back to normal." But if you have that mindset, so many leaders will step right back into the past the moment they step back in their building. And I want to share five things I think that could happen if you don't have the right mindset when you go back to normal or the new normal.

Carey Nieuwhof:

First of all, here's what's likely to happen. You have been innovating so, so much over the last two months. Your innovation curve will come to an abrupt stop. You'll be like, "Ah, I can breathe a sigh of relief. We're all back together again. This is awesome. I know it's a little bit different. We got some social distancing or whatever, but ha." You know what you should do? You should make a list of all the

innovations you've done in the last two months, and then just don't stop that. Crisis is a cradle for innovation and the future belongs to innovators.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Second thing you'll do is, you'll stop pivoting. I'm going to have some more information and some resources on pivoting in the next month. I think this is going to be an essential skill over the next two or three years, because I'm not sure it's going to be a very predictable future. You pivoted like crazy during the crisis. You're tired of it, but you may want to hang on to that skill because the future almost always belongs to agile leaders who adopt and change.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Number three, you will see online as an add-on, not as the future. So, overnight, everybody went online, right? Restaurants went online if they weren't there before, grocery stores did, churches did, businesses did. But what will happen when you try to go back to normal, even though normal doesn't exist, is you'll begin to see online as an add-on, not as the future. Listen, church leaders, everyone you want to reach is online. Business leaders, everyone you want to connect with is online. And if you see online as an add-on, not the future, you'll miss most of the very people you're trying to reach. And the other thing you'll do is, you'll tack online onto someone's job description. "Hey, if you have time, can you take care of our website or online customer service or whatever?" Listen, you cannot have a massive impact online when you spend 1% of your staffing resources on it. So, you're going to need to staff your online presence as though you depended on it because guess what? You do.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Fourth thing, if you're trying to get back to normal is, you'll get crushed by unpredictability. I really believe the future is going to be somewhat more uncertain than any of us want it to be, but if you keep your agility and are able and willing to pivot, you will thrive. And then finally, and I think this is a big one, legal permission is different than social behavior. So, as America and the world opens up and Canada opens up at some point, etc., etc., there is a big difference between what the government says you can do and what people will do. So, we kind of have this idea that, "Oh, everything's going to be back to normal."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, it's probably going to be more greater than that, but let's just play a little game here. Let's just imagine that everything goes back to normal now, like as you're listening to this podcast. You shut it off and you're like, "There's no more restrictions." So, you can gather in your church, fully, pack it out. You can go to football stadiums, concerts, crushing crowds. You can fly anywhere in the world, zero restrictions. There can be lines at restaurants with people waiting to get in, and you can go to a crowded beach. So, let's just say legally, that's all permissible, which will probably isn't by the time you hear that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But question, what if people don't want to do that anymore? I mean, do you want the middle seat on a flight to LA? I mean, you probably never did, but airlines are now even taking middle seats out. Do you want to be next to the guy at the NFL game who just sloshed his beer all over you and coughed all the way through the second quarter? Didn't think so. Do you want to walk into a supermarket, go down a really crowded frozen food aisle, and then stand painfully close to people at the checkout? No.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You see, one of the interesting trends I think you have to monitor is, even if people can gather, will they want to? Or will they want to at least in the same way? Or what about older people you're trying to serve? What if they are going to be basically in some form of lockdown or quarantine for a year or two or just have to be more socially distanced than others? You see, which toggles us all back to the other points. In an uncertain world, online is a lifeline and agility is a superpower. So, if you really care about people, you want to stay agile. It's really hard to go back to normal when normal disappeared. Just some things to think about.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, What I'm Thinking About a lot these days. I'm enjoying this segment. If you are, hey, let me know. Hit me up on social media. I'm on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Very active on Instagram these days. I'm Carey Nieuwhof there. cnieuwhof on Twitter and Facebook. We are back with a fresh episode next time. I so appreciate you. Know that we are 100% behind you and yeah, I'm so glad we're in this together. 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.

PART 4 OF 4 ENDS [01:30:46]