

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 346 of the podcast. My name is Carey Nieuwhof, and I hope our time together today helps you lead like never before. My guest today is Mark Miller. He's the Vice President of High Performance Leadership at Chick-fil-A. We talk all about team recruitment and how you spread culture and so much more. He spent several decades now at Chick-fil-A.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And today's episode is brought to you by Financial Peace University. If you want to help people through their financial stress, just text my name, CAREY, to 33789 to get started for free. And it's brought to you by Pro Media Fire. You can book a free digital strategy session today with Pro Media Fire by going to [ProMediaFire.com/ChurchGrowth](http://ProMediaFire.com/ChurchGrowth).

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, guys, I'm so glad that you're tuning in today, and thanks again for the incredible support and encouragement you've given. I want to talk today at the very end of the show during our, What I'm Thinking About segment, just about what's happening right now. And remember, we record this in advance, but with racial reconciliation. I've got some thoughts on that. Particularly, as a Caucasian leader, what can we do to help? What are some of the fears around that? And then how can you actually make a difference? That's what I want to talk to you about at the end of the show today.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, hey, there's a lot of stress right now. And financial stress, as you know, is stress. And, what do you do about it? So, why don't you help people? So many people have lost jobs. You may want to make a difference in your community. You're wondering how to do that. They're staring at an empty bank account. They've got a house full of kids to feed, and they don't know when this crisis will end.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, you can help others right now by leading a virtual Financial Peace University class. This is the first time ever in the last few months that Financial Peace University has gone virtual. And now, you can bring the proven plan that's helped nearly six million people stop worrying about money to the people you care about; to your church, to your business, to your employees, to whoever, to your neighborhood. The class is totally free to lead, and it's all done through video chat, like Zoom. And right now, our friends at Ramsey Solutions are offering a free webinar where you can learn all about leading a Financial Peace University class. So when you register for the webinar, you will also be entered to win a collection of Ramsey books worth over \$250. If you want to help people leave money stress behind for good, register for the free webinar by texting CAREY to 33789. That's CAREY to 33789.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And there is also, in case you haven't noticed, a disruption happening in the church space right now. And as people are slowly figuring out, things are not going back to normal. So, how do you navigate the

digital shift? Well, you probably need a partner and that's what Pro Media Fire can be with their new Church Growth Program. The Church Growth Program provides your church with a digital coach, creative team and web team. Also, get this, a social team all for less than the cost of a staff hire. So you get this entire team of professionals providing digital strategy and a creative framework to help your church grow online. And the feeling online was temporary? Mm-mm (negative), it's not. So if you want to book your free strategy session, go to [ProMediaFire.com/ChurchGrowth](http://ProMediaFire.com/ChurchGrowth). That's [ProMediaFire.com/ChurchGrowth](http://ProMediaFire.com/ChurchGrowth).

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, I'm so excited to have Mark Miller on. We did this episode, gosh, I'm going to say in 2019. Yeah, and we're finally bringing it to you. It was going to air in the spring, but you know how that went as we pivoted. Mark is brilliant. He started his Chick-fil-A career working as an hourly team member back in 1977. He's been there for the whole ride when they have grown under his tenure from 75 restaurants to over 2,400 locations with tens of billions of dollars in revenue. Incredible. He began writing almost 20 years ago when he co-authored his first book with Ken Blanchard. His latest book, *Win Every Day*, was released a few months ago. Mark is a sought after speaker for leaders as well, and I'm so thrilled to have this conversation. I'm fascinated by Chick-fil-A culture. And without further ado, here is my conversation with Mark Miller.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Mark, welcome to the podcast.

Mark Miller:

Thank you, Carey.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Hey, it is great to have you. So Chick-fil-A. While we're recording this, you have been at Chick-fil-A for 40 years this week.

Mark Miller:

That's correct.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's pretty incredible.

Mark Miller:

That's not counting my time in the restaurant, which preceded that. So it's been over 40 years.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Really? So you started when you were four?

Mark Miller:

Exactly, exactly.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's how it worked, right? And it went from local favorite. You were employee number 16 at Chick-fil-A?

Mark Miller:

I hear corporately, that's correct.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow. So employee number 16, and it's gone from a local favorite restaurant to regional, to a national chain. And now, international.

Mark Miller:

Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I was in on some of the first meetings on expansion into Canada, and you're in other places around the world. That is really fascinating. I'd love to start with you, because you've got pretty much the whole panacea of Chick-fil-A. What were some of the turning points? There are certain things you do as a leader that are just like, "Yeah, once that happened, that was a major breakthrough." I'd like to look at the ones that in particular, gave disproportionate returns. You look back and it's an inflection point.

Mark Miller:

Well, I think the very first and most significant of those points was the model, that through it conceived back in the 60s. This is, of course after the invention of the chicken sandwich.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right, right.

Mark Miller:

You realize? There was no chicken sandwich until Truett Cathy invented that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's hard to believe.

Mark Miller:

It is.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Because people say you invented the chicken sandwich, but that's an actual thing, is it?

Mark Miller:

That is an actual thing. And he began selling it in a short order grill that he operated, that he and his brother opened in 1946. The story he would tell is that it took too long to cook the chicken with the bone in it. So he began experimenting how to cook it more quickly, and realized that if he took the bone out and cooked it under pressure, he could cook it much faster.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And so that boneless, skinless chicken which we take for granted now was not a thing either?

Mark Miller:

That was not a thing. And then I met a gentleman several years ago who told me the chicken sandwich was his idea. And I said, "Tell me more about that." And he said, "Well, I was one of Truett's regular customers and he served me the chicken breast, and it was delicious." And I said, "Truett, next time I come in here, I want to eat that on a bun." So maybe that's local legend, but this gentleman said it was his idea.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Truett isn't here anymore to refute that.

Mark Miller:

That's right. That was the early '60s. That was in the early '60s, so that was the first inflection point. But I think the model-

Carey Nieuwhof:

But wait. Hadn't that restaurant been around?

Mark Miller:

Since '46.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, from 1946 to when?

Mark Miller:

In the early '60s.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow. So, he's been doing this for almost two decades?

Mark Miller:

A long time.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow.

Mark Miller:

Very long. A long time. And much of that time on his own because his brother passed away in a plane crash. So they had opened it together, but Truett ended up running the restaurant himself, and he understood the restaurant business. He even had a room next door that he rented and he could hear traffic on the gravel parking lot and he'd know to get up, because it's a 24-hour restaurant. He'd know they were busy and he'd get up and go help him if he felt like there was a crowd gathering.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Really?

Mark Miller:

So he understood hardware from the beginning.

Carey Nieuwhof:

24-hour restaurant, get up, listen to the gravel in the driveway? Yeah, there's so much hustle behind overnight successes.

Mark Miller:

A lot of hustle, a lot of hustle. But the inflection point, I referenced the model. Truett used to describe it this way. He said, "A business needs two things to be successful." He would say, "Capital and management."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right.

Mark Miller:

But the way he would articulate it, that you reduce your talent pool if you look for one person that has both. He said, "So, if we'll provide the capital, the pool grows exponentially of men and women who would have the management." Today, we will talk about the leadership skills and competence.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow.

Mark Miller:

So, I think that was the turning point.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, he thought money was easier to raise than people? Or money ... Yeah, was that it? No. Or people were easier to raise than money? That's interesting.

Mark Miller:

Well, I'm not sure he would frame it that way. He would say, "If someone had a very high net worth, they may or may not want to run a restaurant."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Run a restaurant, fair enough.

Mark Miller:

So let's get business people, men and women, the first operator was a woman, who want to be in business for themselves, but not by themselves. And he said, "We'll remove the financial barrier and

open this opportunity to countless entrepreneurial-minded leaders." And I think that's been our secret sauce from those early days is we have an extremely high caliber leader in every restaurant.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mark Miller:

And what we find is those men and women tend to select really good people. And then of course, that fuels the whole idea of excellence at the frontlines because you've got great people. I think that is, other than the sandwich itself, the inflection point was when he said, "We're going to find great leaders to operate these local restaurants."

Carey Nieuwhof:

And now, how have you personally kept up with all the change over the years? Because growing, often people will say the people who got you here, won't get you there. And I'm sure not everybody who was around from the early days have stayed, but here you are. Four decades into this, and you've had to scale with the organization. That's not easy.

Mark Miller:

I've been peddling really, really hard. I'll tell you a quick story. A mentor of mine, I bet some of your audience may have heard of, Dr. Howard Hendricks, who passed away probably five, six years ago, he told me the story that changed his life was when one of his professors was justifying the fact that he studied all the time. And Hendrick remembers the conversation when he said, "But don't you have it figured out by now?" Because you've been here for more than 20 years. And that professor said, "I made a decision years ago that I would rather have my students drink from a running stream than a stagnant pool."

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's a good phrase.

Mark Miller:

Howard told me, he said that changed everything for him. And I would say that I have to, the best of my ability, made that same decision, that I want to be that running stream. And I'm going to have to just keep paddling and keep learning and keep growing. That's not my natural bend, that's not my natural temperament. I know some people, if you think about, StrengthFinders would have Learning in their top five. Learning's not in my top 79, I don't think. But I act like a learner because I've chosen to be a learner, because I believe that's an imperative. If you want to lead well, you've got to be a learner.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So how do you learn? How do you do that? What are your disciplines?

Mark Miller:

Well, I'm predatory. It's a daily discipline. The way we say it is your capacity to grow determines your capacity to lead. So I'm seeking out mentors, I'm going to conferences, I'm reading or Audible. I'm trying to do book a week. And Chick-fil-A has helped, honestly, because I've been here a long time, but I've

actually changed careers multiple times within the business. When you get a new career, you're looking straight up at a new learning curve.

Carey Nieuwhof:  
Yeah, that's true.

Mark Miller:

So at that point, it becomes a survival mechanism that you get to learn a new discipline. So between my personal habits that I've attempted to cultivate and the organization continuing to throw me into new things, I'm just on the journey. I'm just on the journey.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow. You mentioned a number of things there, like you actually attend conferences, which I talk to a lot of leaders who certainly are not leading at your level, and they feel like, "I should be teaching at conferences." But you still attend, notebook open, taking notes.

Mark Miller:

Absolutely, and I teach at a conference from time to time.

Carey Nieuwhof:  
Of course.

Mark Miller:

But I'll try to go to several every year, and I put those on my calendar first, along with family vacations and personal commitments. It's kind of the old big rocks first, and then I schedule things around that. Because I think if you're going to make learning and growing a priority, you have to make it a priority. You can't say, "I'll do it if I have time." I talk to leaders far too often that believe learning is extracurricular. And I say, learning is integral. Learning is central. I said, when you learn, you're better able to serve those you're attempting to lead.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, you make that part of your weekly rhythm?

Mark Miller:

It's part of my job.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's part of your job?

Mark Miller:

It's part of my daily.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right.

Mark Miller:

Well, it's part of my responsibility as a leader.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow.

Mark Miller:

It's what enables me to add value in the future, and it's just a non-negotiable.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Mark, I think that's a really interesting point because I think you're talking obviously, to tens of thousands of really busy leaders who are like, "Mark, let me show you my calendar. I'm just slammed with appointments. I got a message to write this weekend. I've got to talk, I need to give. So I try to bake my learning into evenings and weekends, and the drive home on podcasts like this, or I'm listening to audio books while I'm working out." But you're like, "No, actually make that part of your job." Is that what you're saying?

Mark Miller:

Well, yes, and all those things count. All those things count. I was intrigued 20 years ago or so. I ran across a book called Barbarians to Bureaucrats.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Great title.

Mark Miller:

I'll spare you the details, but the guy who wrote the book took Toynbee's work, where he looked at the rise and fall of more than a dozen civilizations.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Is that Arnold Toynbee?

Mark Miller:

Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

The historian?

Mark Miller:

Toynbee, right. And so this guy mapped that with the rise and fall of organizations.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, wow.

Mark Miller:

Fascinating book.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow.

Mark Miller:

And many things stick with me from that. But one was, he said, "There is a sign that an organization or a civilization is beginning the downward turn." He said, "It's when you apply yesterday's answers to today's questions."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, wow.

Mark Miller:

I'm not smart enough not to keep learning.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I'm with you.

Mark Miller:

And the way things are changing, the way the world is changing, the way the customer expectations, the competition, technology, just the knowledge within the world, I don't have enough stored up to respond appropriately to the ever changing demands of the world.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Are there, when you look back at, say, the last 10 or 15 years, some, I'll call them channels like, "Hey, you just better read, I'm going to pick one out of the year, the Harvard Business Review," just to pick one? Or some books that you are just continually rereading or handing out to people that you work with? Are there some? What's near the top of your list as reliable channels for your growth as a leader?

Mark Miller:

Well, I might surprise you with the first one.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What's that?

Mark Miller:

And that's random forms of input. I actually encourage leaders to go to the magazine rack at the airport or Barnes & Noble and pick up magazines on topics that you have no interest in. Which people look at me like, "Are you kidding me?"

Carey Nieuwhof:

Like cross-disciplinary learning, right?

Mark Miller:

Absolutely.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, 100% random.

Mark Miller:

Random, random cross-disciplinary learning. Because I often describe it like an artist who's putting paint on the palette. You can't paint with it if it's still in the tube, right?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right.

Mark Miller:

And so as you take these inputs, you can actually add paint to your palette that you can then use at some point in the future. So first, I tell people, don't get too locked into any channel. Again, this just fits my style and my approach is I want a wide knowledge of as many topics as possible. Now, as far as specific books are concerned, I'm trying to go through a lot of books, and to always look for what are those new ideas? What are those insights? Additional paints on my palette that I may use later. But to your specific question, *The Effective Executive*.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Is that Drucker?

Mark Miller:

Written 40 years ago. Drucker, it's still a classic. I would say it's the source of the Nile. If you go back in that short little paperback book, he's got single chapters that other authors have built careers on. Literally, literally. So that's a classic, and certainly timeless.

Mark Miller:

I will say that we've just launched some work that should be finished in 2022. We're trying to say, if those were the principles and practices that made executives productive in the last half of that century, what are those principles and practices that will make leaders, senior leaders specifically, effective in the future? And so that's work we just commissioned. We'll have to talk more about that later.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow, I'd love to hear more about that.

Mark Miller:

We're on the front end of that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow.

Mark Miller:

Another book that is a more recent book is Brendon Burchard's book, High Performance Habits, that I stumbled upon six months ago or so. I think that's a fantastic book, and I've recommended it and given it to many people. Again, just off the top of my head, Necessary Endings by Henry Cloud.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, Henry Cloud.

Mark Miller:

I think it's a classic.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I recommend that so often.

Mark Miller:

I've given away several thousand copies of that one.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow.

Mark Miller:

Henry and I have had ... he's a friend, and we've had some fascinating conversations. He actually believes that's what distinguishes the very best leaders from the rest of the leaders in the world.

Carey Nieuwhof:

The ability-

Mark Miller:

Are those that can figure out and have the courage and the personal fortitude to do necessary endings. He says, that's the difference maker. Perhaps I gravitate to it because I'm not really good at that. And organizationally, I'm not sure we're really good at that. And so that's been a very helpful book for me.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Do you want to just explain the concept behind Necessary Endings? Because I think that's on my top 10 lists too. And I recommend it all the ... I did just the other day. How does that show up in your leadership as something that you have to reference regularly?

Mark Miller:

Let me use the example, I think, he uses in that book is that of pruning. He said, "If you ever seen a rose bush that has not been pruned," and he said, "They're actually quite ugly because the plant will produce more buds than it can actually nourish." And the parallel he makes for us as leaders in an organization, or as individuals in our own lives, unless we're willing to prune some things, then we'll have more things starting than we can actually feed. And it actually won't turn out pretty in the end.

Mark Miller:

And so it's just a good constant reminder for me that there are some things that may not have as much value today as they had when they were started, or there may be things that still have value, but there's something waiting in the wings of even greater value. And there's only a finite amount of time, energy and effort that we can bring to bear on any project, initiative, strategy or tactic. So that's another one that's on my top 10 list.

Carey Nieuwhof:

One of the things I've heard you say before is that sometimes in an organization, this is a leadership podcast, but there could be 5,000 different definitions of leadership floating out there. And that was a challenge for you at Chick-fil-A is that you've been in leadership development now here for years, but people in any organization can have different definitions of leadership.

Mark Miller:

Right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So talk about that. I'd love to know your definition of leadership, Mark.

Mark Miller:

All right. Well, let me affirm the assumption that question is built upon. When we really began to become strategic and very intentional about leadership development about 20 years ago, we discovered at that time there were over 6,000 published definitions of leadership.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow.

Mark Miller:

So, yes, that was one of our challenges, is that when you say leadership, everybody would nod. And I would argue that almost everyone has a definition of leadership, but if you've not done the hard work to forge a consensus, people will have different definitions.

PART 1 OF 4 ENDS [00:21:04]

Mark Miller:

And the problem we faced is we needed to accelerate leadership development. We needed more leaders in the moment, but we could see a day when we would need even more leaders. And the team that we assembled realized that the starting point for us, the first barrier that we had to tackle was we need a common working definition. And so I tell people that's the first step in creating a leadership culture. It's not the end all, but you've got to define it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. If you're all working toward different ends or different assumptions, that can be a challenge.

Mark Miller:

Right. Now, our definition specifically, I like to think of it in terms of a picture. And we describe it like an iceberg. And so many of your listeners will remember fifth grade, I don't. But they tell me that in fifth grade I studied icebergs. And you may recall that about 10% is above the water line and about 90% is below. We think that's a perfect picture of leadership. About 10% above or the skills of a leader, and the 90% below represents the character of the leader. And if you accept that picture, it ends the debate, is it about skills or is it about character? We say leadership is about both. Drucker actually said, "The quality of character won't make a leader, but the absence flaws the entire process." So he was on it 50 years ago-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. And you see that all over the headlines today.

Mark Miller:

You have to have both. And so once we embrace that as our picture, we made a strategic decision that we would select for leadership character, and we would train, educate, and develop on skills. Now, that doesn't mean we don't want candidates with skills, but if you've got to teach someone, it's preferable to teach them skills as opposed to transform and reclaim character. Oh, it's possible. It's messy.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You say you've had multiple jobs here and obviously, some opportunity when you start with a very small organization. Why did you choose leadership? Why is that your lane?

Mark Miller:

Well, I think leadership chose me. I serve at the pleasure of the organization and I have been asked to do many things over the years. I started our corporate communications group. I started our quality and customer satisfaction group. I started our operation services group and so forth and so on. I'm great at starting things. I'm not sure that I can finish anything or not. And about 20 years ago, we had a real opportunity, I referenced it earlier. I don't know what your listeners do, but when we have a problem to be solved or an opportunity to be seized, our first reaction is to put a leader on it.

Mark Miller:

And we looked over our shoulder and our bench was not as strong as it needed to be. Because prior to that time, our process for leadership development had largely been immersion and osmosis-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right. Just stay around here long enough you'll figure it out.

Mark Miller:

And you hope and you believe that aspiring leaders, emerging leaders, those paying attention will catch on. And I would say at a certain scope, scale, volume and complexity that might work. I sat around a table with 15 other men and women, some of them world-class leaders, and I paid attention and I learned some things. But by the time we got to the year 2000, we had thousands of people who had never sat around the table with some of those world-class leaders.

Mark Miller:

And our process had been out paced by the growth of the business. And that'll only last so long, you're not going to outgrow your leadership capacity. And so I was asked by the organization to help solve this problem. And it's a journey I've been on ever since.

Carey Nieuwhof:

How did you even start to solve that? Because this will resonate with a lot of organizations. Sometimes the challenge is, "Oh my goodness, we're not growing. We better put the paddles on this and figure out how to grow it." But I talk to a lot of leaders who say the biggest restriction on our growth is not money, it's not interest, it's not curiosity, it's not market, it's the ability to actually launch new locations. And what's holding us back right now is we don't have enough leaders.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You talk to pastors, they don't have enough campus pastors. They don't have enough senior leadership. You talk to business leaders, it's like, "We could franchise this. I just can't." Here's the complaint, just can't find the right people and you can't hire them fast enough either. And you're a fan of developing talent rather than buying it, right?

Mark Miller:

Well, I like actually a combination, but I don't think you stop developing the talent you hire. So I think you're always in the leadership development business. It's just, what's your starting point?

Carey Nieuwhof:

So how did you figure that out? Where did you start?

Mark Miller:

I didn't. I put together a team of really smart people and said, "Hey, guess what we get to figure out?" And as I mentioned earlier, our first step was to say, "What's our working definition?" And we decided that we would articulate those skills.

Mark Miller:

And it was actually my first book, Ken Blanchard found out about our work. And I had the unspeakable opportunity to co-author a book with Ken Blanchard, which was phenomenal. And that's a book called, The Secret. And in it, we talk about our working definition, those skills of leadership. So that was our starting point and we naively thought we were done. I can only speak for myself, I don't want to project. But I thought, "Okay, we can go back to selling chicken now because we've told everybody what leadership looks like." And specifically, we told them what leaders do. They see the future, they engage and develop others. They reinvent continuously. They value results in relationships and they embody the values. And by the way, that spells serve, because that's the secret. Great leaders are always serving leaders as opposed to self serving. They are compelled by the unshakable desire to serve others.

Mark Miller:

That's what the best leaders have at their heart. But they have to have those strategic ways. It's not just washing your car and walking your dog. There are strategic ways that great leaders lead. And so that's the work we did initially. I felt like we were done. Ken approached us and said, "Hey, let's do this book." And after a lot of debate, we decided, "Okay, let's do this. Maybe it'll serve the world," is actually the

decision that came from our senior leadership team. None of us knew that book would end up in 25 languages. It's kind of been crazy, but we thought we were done, let's go back and sell chicken. And it wasn't long until people started calling from the outside and people on the inside started approaching me saying, "What's next?" And I said, "What do you mean what's next?"

Mark Miller:

And they said, "Well, okay, we got the definition. What do we do now?" And it was really that question, what's next? that helped us on this journey to create a leadership culture. Because I say there's something every organization needs more than leadership; they need a leadership culture. And that's a place where leaders are routinely and systematically developed and you have a surplus. And the surplus people think, "Well, that's wasteful." I said, "No, that surplus becomes your bench and a signal that it's working." If you're always behind, I would say, "You don't have a fully orbled leadership culture."

Carey Nieuwhof:

This is like multiple books and decades in the making. But what are some keys to creating that kind of bench, that leadership culture? What have been again, some inflection points that you're like, "Okay, when we started paying attention to this, it really made a difference."

Mark Miller:

Okay. I'll give a couple. We ended up writing about this, it's called, Leaders Made Here. And so how do you build a leadership culture? But you have to define it. It has to start there. And I tell organizations, define it could be to use John Maxwell's definition, or Andy Stanley's definition, or my definition. But you need your organization to agree, create your own. People need to know, what are the behaviors that we value as an organization? What constitutes effective leadership in this context? So you have to define it. Second, you have to teach it because to have a definition ... so let's say, see the future, and you explain to somebody that that's really about vision and you think we're done. Well, then people go, "Well, how do you find vision? How do you communicate vision? How do you turn vision into reality?"

Mark Miller:

So there's a teaching component. After you've defined it, you have to teach it to people. Third, you have to allow them to practice it. We believe ... and it's not us, the research on this has been clear for decades that most leaders know most of what they know about leading through the experience of leading. It's still helpful to know the three keys to delegation because you'll be more successful more quickly than if you start without a clue, but you really learn about leading by leading. And so we're having to ask ourselves over, and over, and over again, when there's an opportunity to be seized or a problem to be solved. If we're not careful, our first instinct is to put a seasoned leader on it because that's safe or safer, but there are many opportunities where you could ask an emerging leader, an aspiring leader, a developing leader to take an assignment so that they could actually practice and grow their leadership.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. How do you ... because this is an active debate with a lot of leaders. When you put a rookie leader, an aspiring leader, a developing leader into a role, how do you protect the brand while developing them? It's a problem for a lot of people. It's like, "Well, the reason we're going to put a seasoned person on is, it has to be done with excellence." So how have you learned to draw that line?

Mark Miller:

Well, I think it's situational. I think there are times that you are going to ... I use the sports example. If it's the World Series and the bottom of the ninth inning, and you got to put a pinch hitter up there, you're going to put the 300 hitter up there. But if it's June and you're eight games out of first place, then let the guy who's betting 125 feel the pressure of that night with bases loaded.

Mark Miller:

So I think it matters. I think you've got to weigh the potential consequences. You've got to weigh the cost of failure. You've got to decide, is this irreconcilable? I think you have to actually figure out what's the probability of success with that emerging leader. So it's very situational.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. Yeah. I get that. Can you give us ... because I love Chick-fil-A and the sandwiches are always hot. The shakes are always cold. And you've got a quality concern. What would be some examples in leadership that you can think of where you could say, "Yeah, we're going to give this to a rookie leader or we'll experiment on the side on these ones."

Mark Miller:

Well, we had a team several years ago that we were forming to do, I would argue some important work. And we began to brainstorm candidates to lead the work. And we had about eight or 10 names on the board and I called time out. I said, "Wait, wait a minute. What do all of these men and women have in common?" People looked at me like, "They all work here." I said, "Okay, what else?" And like, "Nothing, nothing." And I said, "They're all senior leaders." And they said, "What's your point?" I said, "Okay, let's weigh the relative risk of this project. Probably not ... we're not betting the farm. We're not jeopardizing the brand. It's important work or we wouldn't do it. Is there an emerging leader that would benefit from this opportunity?"

Mark Miller:

And we identified someone who we think has a tremendous future, tremendous future, but had actually never led a team and said, "Maybe this is a good chance to see what this person actually does with direct reports." Their growing reputation was based on their individual talent and skill. And I wasn't assuming that they could or couldn't lead, but would this not be an opportunity? And we ended up giving that project to that emerging leader.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay. Those are some great examples. What are some challenges that you guys have faced in trying to build leaders? We always talk about our success stories. You're pretty transparent, pretty honest and open. Where have you kind of hit some walls?

Mark Miller:

Well, I think it starts even with individual leaders, the barriers to personal growth, they tend to revolve around one of several items if not a combination. Sometimes it's just the priority they place on it. And I would argue that leader doesn't see their role clearly if they don't think personal growth and development is a priority. I'm thinking you got to be really careful that you're not given yesterday's answers to today's questions, if you're not learning and growing. So sometimes it's the priority they

place on it. Sometimes it's the pace of their life. I think we can all get so busy that our own personal growth and development can fall to the back burner or in fact, fall off the stove.

Mark Miller:

So priority, pace, every now and then I encounter later it's a pride issue. And thankfully, not often-

Carey Nieuwhof:

They want to know ... they want to be the expert.

Mark Miller:

They don't. They think they know enough. They don't think they need to know anymore. Again, thankfully I don't see a lot of that, but pride is an issue sometimes. And then often I'll say leaders that just don't have a plan. They've not thought strategically, which I think we can help most leaders jump that hurdle because everything else in their life, they've got a plan. They got a plan with their personal trainer and they got a plan for their department or their team or a plan for their organization because they say, "Well, you build a plan if something's important." Well, how about your continued growth and development, and vitality and influence over time? That's pretty important. Let's build a plan there.

Mark Miller:

At the organization level, it's some of the same things. Does the organization make a priority of it? Is the organization moving at a pace where they've actually lost perspective? Is the organization prideful and they don't think it's necessary? Or maybe they just don't have a plan for growing leaders. So it's solvable.

Carey Nieuwhof:

How do you ... and I've asked this of different guests before who've got a background in Chick-fil-A, and I take it character is part of this, but how do you spot talent? Because you talked even at the very beginning of this interview about finding great owner operators and I've met a lot of your great owner operators, what are some selection criteria or filters that you've used to help you continually replenish the supply of leadership?

Mark Miller:

Okay. I want to give you quick two part answer. When we're talking about operators that we would partner with, we look for character, competence and chemistry, and with a healthy dose of entrepreneurial spirit in the mix. And that's been our formula for 40 plus years. So that's pretty much unchanged. But for those listening who are trying to get great entry level talent ... we just finished a project about two years ago, we have encountered the war for talent, just like everybody else. Now we were late to that game for whatever reason, but it has become one of the top issues for the restaurant operators.

Mark Miller:

And so we decided we would go out and purchase some research on what attracts top talent and share it with our operators. And we couldn't find any. We could not find any research. Started with Gallup, went to AON, called Marcus Buckingham. We did everything you would expect, talked to the academic people. We couldn't find any research on what attracts top talent. Now, there's work on what attracts

leaders and we know what we're looking for in leaders. But if you're looking for top talent, frontline folks, we actually commissioned the research.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And just to clarify terms, are you talking about the people who would just be your hourly employees at the store?

Mark Miller:

Well, the operator's employees, all those employees work for the operator-

Carey Nieuwhof:

But yeah, you're talking about frontline workers. So we're not talking about C-suite people here, you're just ... and that makes a difference because they are ... if I go and buy a spicy chicken sandwich, which is my favorite, I don't have a good experience with that person, I might not be coming back. Okay. Clarify.

Mark Miller:

So we commissioned that work and we looked beyond our industry and we looked all 50 states. We looked age 15 to 70, multifaceted, multi-tiered, hired really smart people to figure all this out and had over 7,000 folks in this survey of, what attracts top talent? And we actually discovered there were three things. This is after your basic needs are met. There's some things that top talent and typical talent want. They want a safe place to work. They want fair wages and so forth and so on. But we discovered that top talent wants a better boss. They care who they work for. And now you say, "Well, doesn't everybody want better boss?" Well, at some level, but it's a condition of employment for top talent. They care who they work for. They want someone who's engaged. They want someone who can lead well. They want someone who sees them as a human being.

Mark Miller:

It's nothing shocking there, but the fact that was the first thing, they want a better boss. The second, they want a brighter future. They actually come into the interview with a different set of questions than typical talent. They're saying, "How will I learn? How will I grow? How will I be challenged?" It's a different mindset.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And again, this is even at the minimum wage or entry level.

Mark Miller:

Absolutely. Absolutely.

Carey Nieuwhof:

This is really important.

Mark Miller:

Absolutely. And then third and finally is they want to be part of a bigger vision. They want to make a difference. And so as we learned those things, we ended up discovering what I would call an unintended

conclusion because we had many of our restaurants that said they were doing those three things, they were working to be the better boss ... and that's just not the senior leader. That's all the leaders.

Mark Miller:

And they were trying to help people create a brighter future. And they were actually trying to be part of something bigger, but they said it's not working. And what we discovered is the fourth of the findings, is that you actually have to tell that story. The people have to know that in order to want to come work for you. The work we did, and it actually became a book as well called, Talent Magnet. Well, if the magnet is so tiny, it doesn't have any pull. And so if awareness is really low, then the nobody's going to know that they can come to you to get what they're looking for. So for many leaders, I would say inside and outside Chick-fil-A, the big aha was, "We've got to proactively tell the story, the story that we've already written, just no one knows it."

Carey Nieuwhof:

So how do you tell that story?

Mark Miller:

Well, there are many, many, many, many ways. The most obvious these days is through social media. The numbers are staggering about how many people will go to a website when they're looking for a job or for an organization. And I asked people this, I said, "How long does it take somebody on your website to determine that you're a talent magnet? How many clicks? Can they even figure that out at all, that you're going to provide a better boss, a brighter future and a bigger vision?"

Mark Miller:

So they said, "Well, that's not in my website." I was like, "Well, that's actually what they're looking for." So as crazy as that sounds ... or Instagram-

Carey Nieuwhof:

So you changed your website?

Mark Miller:

Well, there are lots of people who've changed their websites. I had one leader who told me, it was a Chick-fil-A leader, an operator, who used to put pictures of the food on Instagram. He said, "I don't do that anymore." He said, "Everybody on my Instagram site knows we sell food." He's using it to tell the story that top talent will be attracted to. So that's one way.

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Mark Miller:

Another way is using your own employees as ambassadors, that if you've got men and women who've bought into that story, help them understand how to articulate that to their friends and family and associates and others, any number of ways, but you got to be proactive. You got to be strategic, you got to be thoughtful and you got to say, "Okay, here's our story. We want to get it out there." And it's what they want.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's so interesting. You know, because this is a passion point of mine too, about creating a great workplace. But everybody, I used to assume, I won't say everybody, I used to assume, if you could just pay top dollar, you're going to get the top people. And of course the more I've read, the more I've lived, the more I've learned, yes, you have to have a living wage. You have to ... You can't pay people horribly or you'll end up ... but I mean, you pay people adequately, you pay people well, and that's actually not the top motivator.

Mark Miller:

Well, and here's what we've discovered. There is an allure of top dollar. There's no question and what, what has happened. And I've talked to leaders around the country who've tried this, they just raise their wage and they may actually attract some top talent. And then top talent gets in there and they find either they don't have a better boss, they don't have a brighter future, or they're not part of a bigger vision and they leave. So it actually could fuel turnover. It's not that you, again, can't put the next shiny object out there in terms of a paycheck and get some people, but are they going to stay?

Carey Nieuwhof:

You mentioned the talent war. Has it been hard? And again, you've got four decades here. Is it harder now to attract and keep great people than it was 10, 15 years ago?

Mark Miller:

Well, our operators clearly would say it is at the restaurant level. We're very thankful that our retention rate for our operators and our staff, I think is still hovering around 96, 97% and has for 40 years. But it was operators that surfaced this issue as being one of their increasing pain points and challenges, which is why we began to do the work on it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right. And that's the cry you hear everywhere. I just can't find enough people. I just can't find good people. Right. That's I've heard that my whole life. My parents ran a business, the whole deal, right. Okay. So you've got a new book coming out. It is really in many ways on turnaround, which I think is encouraging because you can plant something, but 18 months into the plant, you're already fixing, what's broken and most leaders are probably trying to improve or turn things around. Do you want to talk about that a little bit?

Mark Miller:

Well, I'll try to give it to you quick because this is the fifth book in a five book series. So just a little context. I'll do this quickly. About a decade ago, we started trying to figure out what do the best organizations in the world have in common. And we labeled that a high performance organization, and we spent time with all the usual suspects, from the Navy SEALs and other business icons that you would imagine, and even world championship sailing teams. I mean, we went across the board because we said, "If this is universally true, then we'll find application in our business." So we started that work and that actually became a book called Chess, Not Checkers. And it outlines the four things that all high performance organizations have in common. We were thankful it was only four. Because if it were 12 or 15 would be in trouble, but it was only four.

Mark Miller:

And so what we've done since then is we've done research and resources to support each of those four moves. The first is they bet on leadership. The second is they act as one. The third is they win the heart and fourth, and finally they excel at execution. So the turnaround you're talking about is predicated on the fact, if an organization is well led, the people are aligned and they're engaged. Then you're positioned to excel at execution and greatness hinges on execution. And so this final book is on execution. We spent the last several years trying to figure out, "Okay, we know what the prerequisites are, but what can leaders do that will increase their effectiveness when it comes to execution?" And that's the book that's just being released.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, you tell it as a leadership fable. I don't want to be a spoiler alert here, because actually, it's a really good story. I was saying before we started recording, I'm always, you know, I'm the points guy. I'm always envious of people who can do a leadership fable like you and Patrick Lencioni and others Ken Blanchard. I'm like, Oh, I wish I could write like that. But I can't.

Mark Miller:

Well, I wish I could write like real writers. You know, there you go.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But it's a great story. It's about a football team that didn't have a very good record. New coach comes into town and all of a sudden it's a new day, same players, same players, radically different results.

Mark Miller:

And the parallel story is of the business that is applying those same principles.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Exactly. So you want to walk us through just some of the core elements of execution, because I think so many, I mean, I don't know, we haven't polled our listeners because that's hard to do.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I mean, we have a rough psychographics demographics, but my guess is we're a disproportionate number of visionaries listen to this podcast. Right?

Mark Miller:

Right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Because that's what leaders do. We're visionaries and then we speak it, we think it's Genesis 1. And I said it, so it's going to happen. Right.

Mark Miller:

Leadership always begins with a picture of the future.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yep. And then it doesn't happen. And then we just get frustrated and we get mad. And then we don't know what to do. Execution is a challenge for a lot of visionaries. So you want to walk us through, because this turns things around. Right? Because then you say, well, I'll just go start something new and it'll be better. Not necessarily.

Mark Miller:

Because you may repeat the same mistakes of your past efforts, sure. I think there's a tendency for us all to do that. It goes back to the bigger picture that if an organization doesn't have adequate leadership capacity, now this isn't intended as a process model, but it's still built on leadership. We can't find a high performance organization in the world that's not well led. Can't find one, can't find one. And that's not just the senior leader, that's leaders at all levels because we've actually piloted this execution content in about 70 of our restaurants and saw some phenomenal results in some places. And in other places they struggled a little bit. And one of the challenges in some of those situations was a leadership challenge because it requires leadership to align people, which is that second move to act as one and then to win the heart, to help engage people that requires leadership. So you see why leadership is foundational. It's the leaders that are aligning people and engaging people and positioning them to execute.

Mark Miller:

And so those are the prerequisites. Once you get to execution, I think the one idea I will share with you today for your listeners is that it begins with individual decisions. See, some of the other work that we've done, we've talked to leaders in this case, we're talking to the entire organization. You can't achieve the levels of execution that we're advocating unless individual contributors make a decision. We actually call that first decision, pursue mastery, pursue mastery. And we make it very clear that that is not the expectation. We think that's a heavy burden, but it is the goal. And if you can help people pursue the goal and make progress toward the goal, they will thank you for that. Because the right goals inspire as opposed to expectations that can pull people down. Particularly if it's an expectation, that's not grounded in reality. We're not perfect. No one's perfect. So why put that on people? I actually learned this from some time I spent with the Clemson football program and they don't expect their players to make their block on every play.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. That's strange. Right? Cause you would think so.

Mark Miller:

Well, I thought so. They said, it's the goal and we're going to help you work to achieve the goal. But why would we put an expectation on you if it's unrealistic? Because that's a burden.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So where's the ... because that's really interesting. I remember that from the book too, that, "Hey, it's not going to be a hundred percent all the time." And of course there's almost no team that it, nobody bats a thousand, there's no team that's 100-0. It's just, it's not life and that's not the way going to be with your team. But I think a lot of leaders worry that if they acknowledge that they're going to let their foot off the gas pedal.

Mark Miller:

So lofty goals inspire people, you got to help them. Then you got to encourage them. You got to challenge them, you got to hold them accountable. You've got to have the right tools. You've got to have the right resources. You got to have coaching. I mean it's a team effort. So that's actually the big insight I think one of the insights from this research is that you can't impose the level of execution that we're talking about. You can lift people to it, right. But you can't impose it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So in your book, the coach comes in basically the same players. He puts in some brand new rules and a lot of execution. And that has to happen in the company as well. But how do you know the difference? Because you know, you think whether you have an organization of 10, 100, 1,000, we can all think, well, we don't have to worry about these guys are already self performer. They're high performers. They're self starters. You kind of have your middle, but then you've got that lower quarter, that lower third. And obviously not everyone's going to make it. How do you know whether someone who might be a low performer right now has the potential to become a high performer? Back to almost Necessary Endings, right? Like where, where is that line in your mind?

Mark Miller:

I have no idea. That's kind of the answer. Here's the way we think about it, that we encourage leaders to focus on the process. And so when you find someone who's not performing, let's focus on the process. And actually there're multiple inputs. So recruiting selection, orientation, training, coaching, accountability and say, what is the problem here? Maybe this person is not a good fit. Maybe they're in the wrong role. Maybe the expectations aren't clear. I mean, and so let's start by eliminating the process drivers of that poor performance. And then at the end of the day, that person may not need to work for you. I mean, that's the necessary ending when you say, "We've done what we can." Now I will quickly say that we've done quite a bit of work on engagement as well. And the first place I challenge leaders to look when you find people who are not engaged is to look in the mirror because I think it's the rare exception when it's the person, it's generally the leader or the system that has been created. Rarely is it the person. Sometimes it is. Bad fit, bad selection, bad hire. And then I think you need to deal with that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, sometimes there is no process, right? Like what you're saying, run them through the process. I think one of the stories in the book is there was homework and not all surprise, surprise, not all the high school students completed the homework. Well, it's kind of a selection filter, right? It's like there was the process. Obviously you don't want to be on the team because you didn't do the homework or whatever that would be. But I think with a lot of leaders, it's like, we don't really have a process I'm just mad at you because you didn't do what I wanted you to do.

Mark Miller:

That's my point of look in the mirror. So if you don't have a process, it's like, well now wait a minute. This person is unable or apparently unable to do this job. Well, how clear are we on what the job is and how clear were we when we selected this person? And did we have evidence that they would be a good fit? So again, you may have to, you may have to let that person go, but fix the process. So you don't repeat this again and that you have real clarity on what is the role, what are the expectations? But even then it goes to were they oriented well? Were they trained well? Are they being coached? Do they have the resources they need? So I'm slow to move to it is the problem or the fault of the person.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. That's fair. So you're speaking to some leaders who are going, "I think I have a problem with execution." What's a good first step for them? They're trying to turn things around in the realizing, "Oh yeah, that might be me." What's a good step for them. What should they look at first?

Mark Miller:

How aligned are your leaders? How clear are you with your leaders? And there's a simple, there are any number of ways to get at this, but there's a simple test. Ask each of your leaders around your leadership table, hand out a three by five card if you want to go old school and say, write down our top three priorities for the year or our number one goal for the year. If you're more advanced, ask them to send you a text and then compare your answers. And if you're not aligned with your senior leaders, it will be impossible to be aligned with the organization.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow.

Mark Miller:

I referenced Howard Hendricks earlier. He used to say, "If there's mist in the pulpit, there's fog in the pew." It's not going to get clearer. And so I think anybody who's trying to make significant progress in an organization in any area, start with alignment around your leadership table. It has to begin there.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's a good word, Mark. So I want to pull the camera lens back a little bit. We started talking about Chick-fil-A in general in your leadership, but we talked about change, constant learning, what you're learning, how you're growing, how you're scaling all those things. And yet at the heart of it is that chicken sandwich that was pioneered 70 years ago?

Mark Miller:

Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

A long time, long time ago. When you, from where you sit, when you think of Chick-fil-A as a whole, what things must change and what things must never change? Because it's your leadership. Chick-fil-A's leadership has been a constant thing of we're changing this. We're not changing that. What are the things that are just core and then what else has to keep changing?

Mark Miller:

Well, I think we've already talked about it. I think what has to continue to change is our leaders have to continue to learn and grow. I think that's the ultimate competitive advantage that you can learn and apply quicker than your competition. Our leaders have got to continue to learn and grow. That must change. We must be smarter if we want to have ... Our president said not long ago, he said, "If you want a 10% increase next year, you better grow more than 10%, personally."

Mark Miller:

So that has got to change. What can never change? I think, the operator at the center of our business, because it's that local ownership. I mean, they don't technically own the business, but we want them to behave like an owner. They are our secret sauce. They're our competitive advantage. We've got some high caliber men and women leading these restaurants around the nation. And I mentioned it earlier. Then they tend to recruit better. They tend to execute better. They tend to offer our customers a better experience. And so the operator model is right there at the center of our success.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, it's interesting because I mean, we're here at what a lot of people would say is Chick-fil-A headquarters in Atlanta.

Mark Miller:

We call it the support center.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You don't call it that. That's my point. Tell me why. Because it's not headquarters.

Mark Miller:

Well, it's built on this idea that we're here to serve those operators. I know several years ago I had a time, a chance to spend some time up at Harvard. And I remember after a course on strategy, which I'll confess was one of the most confusing things. I mean, I didn't understand any of it. It was like, "Oh my goodness. I guess I don't understand strategy." It was mind boggling actually. And they asked me then to come up and explain Chick-fil-A's strategy and I'm going, "Uh-oh," after I don't know what you just said for the last two hours. And so I drew a smiley face of an operator with a bunch of arrows leading to it and labeled them all the different departments and functions of our business. And I said, "We exist to serve these men and women that run these restaurants and then they make more money and we make more money and it all seems to work." And that was all I had to say about that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's great, Mark.

Mark Miller:

So we're here to support them.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You get a response to that?

Mark Miller:

Well, mixed. Some thought it was simplistic, and others thought it was genius. And so I chose to focus on those that said it was genius.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. You would do that. And I'm sure some of the critics weren't making an organization with the impact of Chick-fil-A or making 10 billion a year either.

Mark Miller:

Well, I just thought that my slide, my font is a hard to read personal handwritten font and the smiley face. I think if I'd have had a PowerPoint, they might've liked it better, but it was just me drawing on a flip chart.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's great. What would, as you look ahead to the future at Chick-fil-A, what would you say some of the biggest challenges you're facing right now are?

Mark Miller:

Capacity. We are so fortunate that the business continues to grow, and we have got to find ways to continue to offer a great experience under increasing constraints, just the physical size of the parking lot and the size of the kitchen and the size of the dining room. And so we have begun doing things like the app, where some people can order in advance, which is great. They like it. And we like it because that's less people to stand in front of the cash register. We're now experimenting with delivery through a third party and where we would do the delivery because then people can enjoy the great taste of Chick-fil-A without having to physically come into the restaurant. So we're thankful for the success and the growth and the business, but capacity has become a challenge for us. And we want to make it as we want to make it as easy as possible for people to eat Chick-fil-A.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Too many people are coming kind of thing?

Mark Miller:

Well, I don't think I would say it that way, but yeah, we want to make room for everybody. And again, if you can't find a place to park or if the lines are too long, then you might not eat with us. And so that is the challenge we're working on right now. And even behind the curtain, we're trying to be sure that our supply chain can keep up because the supply chain in our industry, the fast food industry was not built for the kind of volumes that we're doing. And so we're having to figure out how do you keep product in the restaurants?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow. So those are good problems.

Mark Miller:

They're great problems to have.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But I mean everything down to where do you get your chickens, potatoes, all those things.

Mark Miller:

And then how do you get them to the restaurant? Even if our partners can produce them, there's then the supply chain mechanism of transporting and physically getting it to the restaurant. So we're working on all of those things.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I don't mean this in the narrowest sense. So I hope it comes across right. And I can clarify it a little bit, but we all have competitors, right? So you could say it could be Popeye's or it could be, that's not where this question is going. What do you think your greatest competition is? Or your greatest threat is so to speak. And that could be internal or external. I'll give you would say, you know what the real ... because even as a church leader for 20 years, I always said to people, "Our competition is not other churches. You know what it is? It's a beach on a sunny day, it's a warm bed in the winter, that's our competition." And it's our own inability to, to reach more people. So I'm talking more in that. What would you say your greatest competition is?

Mark Miller:

Well, I think I'll give you a two part answer.

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Mark Miller:

It's really anyone who serves good food fast because our customers, we continue to talk to them and they're generally in a hurry. And if they think we're too busy, they may go to any number of other restaurants that they perceive can serve them good food fast. But I write about it in the new book, and I don't say this on behalf of the organization, but it fit the story quite well and I'm reflecting on this. That maybe the real competition, the real challenge might be arrogance or complacency and we just want to defeat that. We want to keep learning, we want to keep growing when to keep adding value, want to keep serving more and more customers. So anybody who serves fast food could get your money tomorrow at lunchtime, but we don't want to be our own worst enemy.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. They say sometimes ... and you make a great product, I'm a consumer where I can be.

Mark Miller:

Thank you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But, in some respects, you're selling speed and cleanliness and quality, it's not just food.

Mark Miller:

Yes, all of the above. I mean, people want great food, they want it fast and accurate and we believe they want genuine hospitality. Now, they don't expect genuine hospitality everywhere, but we have found that they value that and some of your listeners might know we made a strategic decision almost 15 years ago that we wanted to add a hospitality component. So the fact that you have great experiences in our restaurants and folks generally say, "My pleasure," when you say, "Thank you," that's not an accident. We believe that people would value that and it's the way we wanted to show up for our customers. And so we said, we've had a competitive advantage we believe for years, that was based on the food, but food, you can copy food. And so let's see if we can up the ante a little bit and keep great food at the foundation and be sure the place is clean, but let's layer in this genuine hospitality.

Carey Nieuwhof:

How are you driving innovation now? Because the double drive-thru, that was a Chick-fil-A innovation. You're not the only one who does it anymore, but many Chick-fil-As now have the double drive-thru, people coming to you to take your order, whether that's a note pad or iPad, I think that was a Chick-fil-A thing. Your milkshakes, which are great, was an owner operator innovation and so on. How do you continue to encourage innovation in those areas?

Mark Miller:

Well, corporately, we made a decision a decade ago or so that we wanted to strengthen our innovation muscle. And we've built an innovation center and we've done training for staff and even today we have innovation workshops and we do innovation showcases and we're trying to decentralize innovation so that innovation is happening all across the business. And what that tends to do is it spins up more innovation.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Do you have a ... and I don't know that this is an answerable question, but do you have a filter or any filters that tell you, "Oh, this is really great." Like the milkshake might've been one of those things where you thought, "That's really off mission. We're not dairy queen, we do chicken sandwiches." Is there a filter where you go ... because most leaders sitting in a seat are like, there's no shortage of ideas and you can get so many that you're no longer even about your core business. So what has helped you make those decisions about what to adopt and what not to adopt?

Mark Miller:

Well, I don't want to make it sound too precise, because innovation is messy and you got to try a lot of things generally, but we have a rigorous planning process and we're more and more comfortable with prototyping and pilots and tests and let's let the customers help us figure this out.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So you might roll it out in a single store or market?

Mark Miller:

Well, yes, but we'll let customers taste it before it ever goes to store in markets, we bring customers in on a new product. But we talk to operators, we get customers involved, we certainly will get the finance people involved to be sure that it makes sense from a financial standpoint. But we're more and more comfortable with trying things and then take them through our planning process and we don't fund everything. And some things we'll put on hold and some things we'll slow down and some things we'll accelerate. So it's an elaborate process, we have a lot of people who get involved to try and make those decisions and we do the best we can.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What do you think the greatest opportunity is for Chick-fil-A right now as you look ahead?

Mark Miller:

I, along with many, many others are excited about international. There's a big world out there, there's a big world out there and Canada got to go first.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Absolutely, thank you for that.

Mark Miller:

And so we've got a team, we've just added a new member to our executive committee, staff that team well, and they're negotiating on sites in a number of countries right now. We've made a commitment to international and I think about the, almost how many, 7 billion people that don't live in the U.S. I'm excited about international.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, and as I shared with some of your team before, when you were looking at Canadian expansion, I think your greatest thing, just as a Canadian, I think one of the greatest innovations is the way you treat people and customer service. Because I don't know, it's just, the bar is fairly low and I think you set it so high. But in a lot of places, you basically get grunts, eye rolls, people who are ... and I feel bad for the employee, because clearly they're not having a good time, clearly they did not wake up excited to go to work this morning. And the way you're able to reproduce that culture is fantastic and the chicken's pretty good too. So Mark, anything else you want to share? Chicken's great.

Mark Miller:

Well, thank you, thank you. I appreciate those kind words about the chicken. I've been enjoying it for 40 years and plan to continue to do so. I would just encourage leaders. You are the architect of the future, don't miss that opportunity. What story do you want to write? What do you want to build? Do you want to build a high performance organization? It is within reach, you have to decide. And I think when leaders lead, a lot of good things happen.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, tell us a little bit more about the book and then where people can track with you online.

Mark Miller:

Okay. Win Every Day, it's coming.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I think it's March, which ... I think this March, around that time.

Mark Miller:

First week in March, I think that's right. And so first week in March, any proceeds that I receive, I donate to charity, done that with all the books for 20 years. And so excited for the opportunity to share what we've been learning and maybe it'll serve leaders. And that would be our hope that you'll find something to help your organization take a step forward.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Are you active on social? And if so, where?

Mark Miller:

Yes. [HighPerformanceLeadership.com](http://HighPerformanceLeadership.com), is where you can find me.

Carey Nieuwhof:

All right, Mark. Thank you so much.

Mark Miller:

It's my pleasure.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, as usual, we have show notes. If you want to drill down a little bit more or get some free transcripts to study this and some of the principles in it, you can find that at [CareyNieuwhof.com/Episode346](http://CareyNieuwhof.com/Episode346).

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, I've got a, "What I'm thinking about," segment. I'm just going to share some honest thoughts about what's going on with race. And honestly, how someone in my position might be able to respond in a helpful way. So I know that's something a lot of us are thinking about, I'll be talking about that in a few minutes. But I'm very excited because our spring archive is finally coming to air this summer in light of the Coronavirus and all the new episodes we did. But, Nir Eyal is somebody that I have really appreciated, he wrote a great book a few years ago that took Silicon Valley by storm, it's called *Hooked*. And now he's got a brand new book and it's called *Indistractable*, and it's basically how to keep yourself from being completely consumed by technology and well, it's fascinating conversation, here's an excerpt.

Nir Eyal:

If you're a member of the Hallmark Keepsake Ornament Club, one of the privileges is that when a new shipment of Christmas ornaments comes in, in the middle of summer, you're invited to help unpack them and stock the shelves. I know, right?

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's brilliant, that is brilliant.

Nir Eyal:

But let me tell you, this is the incentive. Why? Well, because Bruce is going to be there and Marjorie is going to be there and my friends that I've been interacting with throughout the year are going to be there. So the product is the Christmas ornaments, but the service, why people keep coming back, is for the interaction with their community.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's coming up next time, subscribers, you get it automatically for free. Thank you to everybody who's leaving ratings and reviews. If this episode is helpful, please share it on social media. And use the show notes as well to maybe study this with your team or dive a little bit deeper. We just want to bring you the best conversations in leadership, and that's what we're doing.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Coming up for subscribers, just so you know, you've got Patrick Lencioni coming up, Bob Goff, Danielle Strickland, Dharius Daniels, Jo Saxton, Henry Cloud, Sam Collier, Levi Lusko and so many more. And speaking of Sam Collier, he is the inspiration for the What I'm Thinking About segment. So this segment is brought to you by Pro Media Fire, if you haven't yet booked your free digital strategy, go to [ProMediaFire.com/ChurchGrowth](http://ProMediaFire.com/ChurchGrowth). And it's brought to you by Financial Peace University. So you can help people leave money stress behind by leading a virtual Financial Peace University class. Register for their free webinar by texting CAREY to 33789, that's CAREY to 33789.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So in today's What I'm Thinking About segment, I want to talk to you about the situation with racial reconciliation in the United States and Canada, around the world. We have seen a lot of things precipitated by many deaths, but most notably over the last few months, the death of Ahmaud Arbery, which was really just a gun down and then the death of George Floyd, which precipitated rioting and peaceful protests. And, oh man, I'll tell ya, it has been a time unlike any other. And I've sat down as a Caucasian leader and tried to think, "Okay, what can I do?" And longtime listeners will know we've had, of course, numerous African-American guests and other guests and we'll talk about reconciliation from time to time.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And recently on Blackout Tuesday, I sat down with my good friend, Sam Collier, and we did an Instagram live, which we will link to in the show notes that you may want to have a look at. And I just talked to Sam very honestly, and I want to share with you openly, and I think a bit vulnerably, some of the questions and concerns that I have.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And I started by saying to Sam, probably the biggest fear I've got when I want to speak out and try to do the right thing and try to help the cause of a reconciliation is, I'm just afraid as a white leader, that I'm going to say the wrong thing. I'm going to misuse a hashtag or I'm going to try to say something helpful and it's going to come out the wrong way and I'm going to get pummeled on my platform about it. And he said, "Yeah, Carey, that's a very real risk." And Sam, as an African American said, "I get beat up too." He says, "Some people think I'm not extreme enough because I support nonviolence. And then other people think, oh no, I've gone too far."

Carey Nieuwhof:

And there's a number of leaders, I won't name them, who have tried to speak out and they've had to take posts down and you know what, there's part of me, deep down, that you always want to say the right thing. I don't like criticism, you don't like criticism, but as Sam reminded me, it's far more important to do something than to do nothing because silence is deafening in a time like this. And so, I was posting on social media, I'm talking about it here on the podcast, because it's something I'm really committed to, I really believe the kingdom of God comes not just in the future, but it comes now, and we're all brothers and sisters. And Sam really opened up my eyes to some of the systemic problems and some of the conversations and dialogue I've had with African American and also some of my Latino and Hispanic friends about what's going on, reading their posts and talking to them about it, it's a very different experience.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And I have a lot of friends who are police officers, there's a lot of good cops, but Sam pointed out, he said, "You as a Caucasian person were raised to believe the police are there to protect you," and fundamentally that's true. If you're a teenager doing something you shouldn't be doing, of course you're scared of the cops, but for the most part, that's right, the police are here to protect me. And he said, "I was raised as an African American," Sam said, "To believe that I have to protect myself from the police," and you're just far more likely to get pulled over. I watched videos with Tony Evans, the preacher saying he got pulled over for being in the "wrong neighborhood." Mike Todd, who's been a guest a couple of times on the show this year, talked to him, one of his videos about being pulled over for being suspected because he bought a nice house in the "wrong neighborhood," just because of the color of his skin.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And that's something I've never had to deal with and so I think it's really important for those of us who have a platform, I think it's really important for those of us who have influence. And as Sam pointed out, if you have a hundred followers on Instagram and you're white, you've got influence, you've got a voice, not only to say something, but also to do something as well.

Carey Nieuwhof:

One of the things that can happen, particularly in the social media age is that we do something for #blackouttuesday, and then we say, "Okay, well, I did my part, right?" And it would have been easy to talk about something else today, it would be easy to ignore that in future episodes of this podcast. And I just think we need to do better than that, I think we need to diversify the tables that we eat at. I think we need to have conversations and pursue relationships with people who don't look like us.

Carey Nieuwhof:

One of the things that was really a learning for me, because I had a number of you who listen to this podcast, reached out to me and said, "Hey, are you going to do anything about racial reconciliation?" Of course, I want to, but I went back into my archives to find some episodes where we talked about it, and there are some episodes we'll actually link to those episodes in the show notes, but I don't always talk about it with African American guests.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And I said to Sam, and this is just like, I'm being really transparent here and really open just taking you behind the curtain. I'm like, "I was told by an African American friend that one of the best things you could do, sometimes when you interview a person of color, is not to talk about their race, but just to value them for their ideas." And I won't name this friend, but he just said to me, he said, "It's very rare for an African American person to have a white person like yourself, who's known in the leadership space, just say, wow, that is a brilliant idea. And not add an asterisk, for an African American or for whatever." And he goes, "So when you value our ideas, you honor us." And so I've been very intentional about that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And I went back over some episodes, the transcripts for times where I've had African American leaders that I really respect, and I'm like, "Oh yeah, we didn't talk about racial reconciliation or race relations in that episode." And I asked Sam about that and he said, and I never thought about this, I just never thought about it. Sam said, "Well, there are some platforms where I have to make sure I don't talk about being black, because that would actually make me lose points." And then I thought, "Oh gosh, I was

trying to help, and maybe I didn't help, maybe that worked against me." And so I think one of the principles moving forward is when I talk to someone who's not Caucasian, I'll just say, "Hey, do you want to talk about being Hispanic? Do you want to talk about being black? Do you want to talk about that at all?" And give them the option, rather than making the assumption myself.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And I think that's a really good principle for all of us who have influence or power, and because you're a leader, you have influence or power is I was really trying to help. And obviously there were probably times where my idea that I wasn't going to talk about race, had the opposite impact. So I'm going to be more sensitive to that. And for those of us who have the influence, for those of us who have a little bit of a platform, it's going to be really important, I think to listen with an open heart and open mind and to also take some risks, say some things.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And if I watch some, and I won't again, name them because I haven't had this conversation, but there was one guy with hundreds of thousands of Instagram followers, a white preacher, who, young guy just really came out on the side of racial reconciliation and lost tens of thousands, perhaps a 100,000 followers as a result. And you know what, that's okay. Because as Sam said to me in this Instagram conversation we had, he said, "The moral arc of the universe bends toward justice." And I think that's right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And so we all have a role to play, I think that's personal, I think it's using your platform. I think it impacts what you say and how you say it and occasionally you're going to get it wrong, but I need to remind myself not to let my fear of reading angry emails or seeing points about, "You didn't say this, right. He didn't say that right," not get in my way. And just to make sure I stand with the people that I love, the people God created. And yeah, we want to see the kingdom of God come, not just in the future, but now.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So anyway, you may have some thoughts on that, feel free to leave a comment in the show notes or hit me up on social. I'm trying to figure this out with all of you and in particular, I would love to hear from African Americans from Latino, Latina, Hispanic, and other people, indigenous people. I got an email the other day from someone who is an indigenous American, who said she's been listening to this podcast for a number of years, it's really helped her in her leadership. She's married to a man who has a black, I think father and a white mother and they have really, really enjoyed the conversations on this podcast, it's helped them in their leadership. So yeah, I'd love to hear from you on this. My email, by the way, is [carey@careynieuwhof.com](mailto:carey@careynieuwhof.com). Love you guys, and we're all trying to make a difference together in these really unusual time. So we're back next time with a fresh episode. Thanks so much for listening, 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 [01:22:42]

