

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 132 of the podcast. My name is Carey Nieuwhof, and I hope our time together today helps you and maybe your team lead like never before. This was a really fascinating conversation, this episode. I had it with Greg Atkinson. Greg does this thing where he goes and is a secret shopper at a church. I just want to confess, I thought, "This is going to be interesting," but I thought I had it all figured out. Man, could not have been more wrong. In fact, this is the first interview I really couldn't finish in an hour and a bit.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And so, I've invited Greg back at a future date because he gave an audit that was so thorough, of what you need to look for in your church, in terms of being welcoming to outsiders, that we barely got in the door and the main worship service before the hour was up, and you're going to be like, "Really, you spent that much time in the parking lot and the reception?" I just found this fascinating and took a lot of notes and I hope you'll enjoy it too.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So that's our guest this week. It's Greg Atkinson, and he's going to help us think through how a visitor really experiences your site, the secrets of a secret church shopper. Anyway, that's going to be a lot of fun. Hey, I just want you to know, have you guys yet registered for Rethink Leadership? It is this big massive event... Well, actually it's not. I want to say big massive event. Isn't that what we leaders always say? No, actually it's kind of a smaller event. It's for 500 people or less, and we are almost sold out.

Carey Nieuwhof:

We would love for you to get in on it before it's too late, because we are going to get together some of the best leaders in the country. You can just go to rethinkleadership.com and see the list of speakers. We have everybody from Bob Goff, to Danielle Strickland, to Jon Acuff, Reggie Joiner, myself, Brad Lomenick. We have Les McKeown. Remember him on Predictable Success, and the life cycles of a church and, oh, many, many others. Carlos Whittaker is going to be there. It's going to be exceptional. And really, we want to connect with you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

We're going to have some incredible affinity conversations which are just smaller, where you can connect with some speakers. You're going to be seated around tables where you'll be able to connect with each other. This is the second time we're doing it. We just had lots of incredible feedback to year one. And so, if you haven't been in on it, we would love to invite you. If you're a senior pastor, campus pastor, executive pastor, you are invited. If you were there last year, hey, make sure you get in on year two. It's all new content, all new content. And of course the relationships are worth the price of admission alone.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So drop by rethinkleadership.com before it's too late. For everybody who's ever tried to train their church staff, you've got a good checkout trainedup.org if you haven't done it already or if you're not using it. Large churches are using it, small churches, midsize churches. They've got a budget that will fit you. Here's the idea, rather than trying to gather everybody in the same room at the same time for training, say, your guest services team or your kids' ministry people, or your small group leaders, which is almost impossible. I mean, how do you get 50 people, 20 people, 10 people, a hundred people in the same room at the same time to train them? Almost impossible.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Trained Up actually helps you train them virtually. It's your content delivered through Trained Up to your team. You actually have a shot, using TrainedUp, at actually getting 100% of your volunteers completely trained and ready to go. Not only that, but I mean, here's what happens. You train your volunteers briefly and it's like, "Okay, we've got a lot of people in the room," but then you recruited five more next month and two more volunteers the month after. Well, how do you train them? Again, if you deliver your content online, it works incredibly well.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Just head on over to trainedup.org and make sure you check out what they offer, because I really think it's going to help your church grow. Got to let you know about one more really exciting thing, and that is, during this interview, you're going to hear Greg Atkinson talk about a church welcome card. And so, I asked him, kind of put him on the spot, and said, "Can you provide the best sample ever of what you think should be on a church welcome card, the kind that first-time visitors send in?"

Carey Nieuwhof:

Guess what he did. He created one just for you. We always have show notes, but you're probably going to want to especially go over to them right now, and you can find them at careynieuwhof.com/episode132. Greg has generously and for free shared what he thinks is the ideal welcome card. Now, you can brand it alike. It's basically just, what is the data you should be capturing? And so, this is based on his information that he's collected from literally visiting hundreds of churches. You can find that at careynieuwhof.com/episode132, or just go to leadlikeneverbefore.com and search around and you'll find it there. That's what you will find. Without further ado, here's my conversation with Greg Atkinson on secret church shopping.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, I'm thrilled to have Greg Atkinson on the podcast this week, Greg, welcome.

Greg Atkinson:

Thank you for having me. I'm excited to be here.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Really excited. Give us a little bit of a background on how you got into doing this secret church shopper stuff, because you've been on staff at a church as a campus pastor. You've been involved in the church space for a while. But how did you seize on this?

Greg Atkinson:

Well, I've served as a pastor for a couple of decades in church ministry, and I started out as a worship pastor, so strong pulse on worship and creative ministry. And then, the last maybe eight years serving as a campus pastor at a multi-site church. But I was in between churches at one point and I was coaching church planters through ARC. Billy Hornsby, who was the president of ARC mentored me. We spent a lot of time together. I have a new book that I dedicated to Billy. He was just a huge influence in my life.

Greg Atkinson:

We were sitting in a hotel lobby one day and he just looked across at me and said, "Greg, you need to be a secret shopper." And I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "I think you would be a good secret shopper." He said, "And I'll write you your first endorsement." And so, he wrote me an endorsement. He emailed the whole ARC database and said, "You need to hire Greg to be a secret shopper for your church." People started contacting me and the rest is history. But it all goes back to Billy Hornsby.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Isn't that interesting? How long ago was that? Because Billy died a few years ago.

Greg Atkinson:

Yeah, that was about nine years ago.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow. What do you mean by secret shopper? Just for somebody... I mean, we probably all have an image or an idea of what it means, but what does that term mean to you and to the churches that have utilized that?

Greg Atkinson:

Some people call it a mystery guest, some call it a mystery worshiper. Some people are familiar with the term secret shopper. Obviously, in the business world, there's a lot of secret shoppers. I've also secret shopped restaurants, and hotels, and things like that. But in the church realm, it is somebody like myself that comes in with a pretty trained eye and just observes things as a guest. Observation is key. But there are companies out there that just hire random people to come in and write down observations.

Greg Atkinson:

I'm a little different just because I've been doing it for so long. I know what to look for and I know what surprises me. I know what confuses me. I come in as somebody who has never been at that church before and write about my observation as a guest and write a report for the churches evaluating just about everything they do on a weekend experience.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You see, that's fascinating to me. How did you figure out the criteria for this? Like how did you, when you were starting out... I'm sure it's evolved over the nine years, but did you study what Target's secret shoppers would do, or Home Depot's secret shoppers would do, or Walmart secret shoppers would do? Because you're right. I think we all basically know every store has secret shoppers where you go in and basically it's an audit, an audit through the lens of a customer, what's the customer experience like? How did you figure that out? How would you even know what to look for other than your own personal preferences?

Greg Atkinson:

I did a lot of research. I did work with some companies in the hospitality industry, like I mentioned, restaurants, hotels. I looked for some generic questions that just go across the board, of how you greet people, how you make them feel welcome, how you make them feel at home. I interviewed friends that are not Christians. I interviewed the church people that are fed up with church and don't want to go anymore. I interviewed pastors. I did a lot of reading, a lot of research. I've read your blog over the years.

Greg Atkinson:

I've done a lot of behind-the-scenes work on what does it mean to be hospitable? What does it mean to help somebody feel at ease? I will say, it has evolved over the years. I always joke, I feel like the people in the early years get jipped because my reporting now is radically different than the early years. It has really come a long way. There's a very, very detailed report that I go over with the senior leadership of the church. But I have learned over the years, I've read books on it. I'm not the first secret shopper, obviously.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Sure.

Greg Atkinson:

I've talked with other secret shoppers. I've read things like the Five Star book. I've looked at what other people use as their evaluation. Mine is greatly deeper and more detailed, but I have learned from many others. I've had secret shoppers, church secret shoppers, call me up and pick my brain. I've picked their brain.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's good. I mean, that's a solid methodology. It's more than just, "Oh, I like this," or, "I didn't like that," which is sometimes how I think the popular notion of what a secret shopper would be. I think every pastor, every church leader has been in the place where you're feeding through newcomer feedback and there seem to be competing demands in there too. Somebody thought the music was too loud. Well, you never hear it was too quiet. I guess maybe theoretically do. But some people thought it was too aggressive. Some people thought it was too soft, whatever. And so, you have these competing demands.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Another question about methodology and then we're going to break down what people look for and some of your key findings, because we really want this to help church leaders in figuring out, gosh, okay, well, without you coming to our church, you can tell me some things that we may be doing well or maybe doing poorly that could help us make changes even as early as this weekend. One of my big questions was, when you're thinking about what works or what doesn't work, do you look through the lens of let's say a Christian who's moving into a new community?

Carey Nieuwhof:

So you're in Charlotte, somebody who moved from Atlanta to Charlotte, just looking for new church, a Christian. That's one category. Another would be an unchurched or dechurched person. They could be

two separate categories. The third would be the kind that I fear, the serial church shoppers. This is church number 18 in the last six months, right?

Greg Atkinson:

Right. Right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Not quite. But in the last five years, I've been to five different churches, and you're next on my list. Do they see things through different lenses? Or how does that work? Because I would think a church shopper would look through a different lens than maybe an unchurched or a dechurched person would. How does that work?

Greg Atkinson:

As far as myself, I look through all lenses, unchurched, dechurched, church. But one of the things I have found over the years is excellence transcends. You mentioned earlier about preferences. Yes. I have my preference. I'm plugged in to a modern worship church with a modern style substance, a small group-based ministry, a vibrant children's ministry, modern worship music. But when I evaluate a church, I look for excellence. I have worked with the most traditional of traditional churches. I have worked with acapella churches and the Church of Christ. I worked with First Baptist, Dallas, which is very, very traditional, but excellence transcends.

Greg Atkinson:

So I try to come in with a blank slate of, "This may not be my cup of tea, but are they doing it well? Are they doing it in a way where they remove roadblocks?" And so, whether I'm a Christian moving to a city and looking for a new church home, I'm still going to want to be welcomed and loved and accepted. And if I'm an unchurched or dechurched person, I'm going to want to be welcomed and loved and accepted. Now, they do look for different things, but I try to look through each lens. I also asked for feedback. There's a lot of things I do on the report that people don't know until they get it and they're surprised.

Greg Atkinson:

I talk to people in the community. I do a lot of things behind the scenes to get a pulse of what that church means in the community. But there are a lot of lenses. I don't really deal with the serial shopper. That's not something I-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. The unpleasable serial shopper. Yeah. You just stay away from them.

Greg Atkinson:

Yeah. That's not something I spend a lot of time on.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Nor do I think church leaders should. I mean, those people are unpleasable. I really think so. This is good to know, and that's encouraging because it's model-independent. You're saying you can be traditional, you can be contemporary, you can be this, you can be charismatic, non-charismatic, etc. But there are certain things that transcend. You can argue all day long whether one model is more effective than the

other, but at the end of the day, if you're going to be the best version of traditional church, or the best version of a more contemporary church, or the best version of whatever kind of church you do, there are things you can do well or poorly within all the models. Okay. What are some differences, broadly speaking, between what a church person would look for and what an unchurched person would look for?

Greg Atkinson:

I think a church person, the way they view a church website, is through a little different lens. For example, they may spend more time on the beliefs page, or if your church has a history page, of how did this church get started. An unchurched person, I don't think they're going to spend a lot of time on the beliefs page or the history page, but I do believe they care about the vision of the church. I believe they want to know what the church's mission is.

Greg Atkinson:

I believe they are looking for, and this is something I'm a big proponent of, the church website having a "I'm New" button or a "First Visit" button or a "What To Expect" button and click on that, and then take them to a page that puts them at ease and says, "On your first visit, you'll find a first-time guest parking. Somebody will greet you there. They'll walk you in, introduce you to somebody at the welcome desk. And they will get you where you need to go as far as children's check-in and things like that.

Greg Atkinson:

They'll show you where the auditorium is and explain, "We're going to have 15 minutes of music, then you'll hear a 30-minute biblical message that is relevant. And then we have children's programs going on for you." Something that just puts them at ease of, "Here's what it's like." We live in a world where, it blows somebody like my parents' mind, but there are people that have never darkened the door of a church. Like they don't know if we're a cult. They don't know anything about us. And whatever we can do to say, "Look, there's going to be some music." If you're a multi-site, "You're going to see a pastor on a video screen," just something that gives them a heads-up of, "Here's what's going to happen." Somebody churched is going to understand that, so it goes without saying.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. I want to ask this, and this is such an elementary question. But just to be 100% clear, why is that important? I think you've already half explained that, but for somebody going, "Really, you need that level of detail?" I agree with you, but just underscore for all of us, why is that so critical if you're really hoping to reach people?

Greg Atkinson:

Let me think. I think the unchurched person, if they are showing up, that means God's at work. God's at work. I think of the Henry Blackaby concept of experiencing God, that God is at work behind the scenes, join God where He's at work. There was a book on the Holy Spirit by Charles Spurgeon many years ago, where he said, "If somebody asks a spiritual question, that is evidence that the Holy Spirit is already at work, and then we should be sensitive to that." So if somebody is viewing a church website and they are totally unchurched, lost as can be, but they are looking at your website, that means they are...

Greg Atkinson:

Somehow the Holy Spirit has piqued their interest. Somehow God is at work. Could be circumstances, could be a tragedy in a family, could be a divorce, could be the loss of a child, that something has happened and they are seeking God. They are seeking Christ. They are seeking help. I'm all about removing barriers and roadblocks, which I learned from Andy Stanley, doing whatever we can to make it easy for people to come to church, to be welcome, to get plugged in, to find out about God, to begin that relationship with Jesus.

Greg Atkinson:

Nelson Searcy in his book Fusion talks about, if a first-time guest turns into a second-time guest, they are 80% more likely to get plugged in and eventually begin a relationship with Christ. And so, to me, it's all about turning first-time guests into second-time guests. I back up from there, they will never be a first-time guest if they don't feel welcome on the website and see an easy path into this intimidating thing of visiting a local church.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. I think that's a really good point, and you know what, we weren't planning on going there in the pre-scripted questions. But I think you're right. Nine times out of 10, the very first encounter that somebody has with a church these days is not the parking lot. It's not the lobby. It's the website. I mean, you think about it. How many places for every listener of this podcast... Have you ever gone to a resort or to Disney world without checking it out online first? Of course, you haven't. No. Even restaurants. I mean, I'm always checking out restaurants, unless it's a very trusted friend who says, "Just go there." But usually, I'm going to check them out first online.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Let me ask you this, because we redid our website just under a year ago. The challenge for me was, I was surprised, but consistently year after year, your Google Analytics will tell you what people look at. Staff page was one of the top requested. There was the homepage, messages like watch or listen or whatever your tab is. Number three, again and again and again, staff. Is that weird? Is that just us or is that like people are looking to see who you are? How does that work?

Greg Atkinson:

That's everybody. I'm really big on that. It's in every report I do for a church. There was a magazine, Collide Magazine, years ago that WorshipHouse Media and Igniter Media had put out, they did a survey and a study and the number one most visited page on a website was the staff page. And I quote that article in every report I do. Some people don't put any thought into their church staff page. I'm really big on having pictures of the staff. They want to know what the pastor looks like. They want to know what the children's minister looks like. They want to know what the worship leader looks like.

Greg Atkinson:

I like to have access to their email address. I even like when they do some little mini bios. Churches do those in very different ways. Some are very professional, depending on the church, and their culture, and their background. You have some churches where all the staff seems like they all have PhDs. And so, their bios look a little bit differently. And then you have some staff's cute bios where it says something funny about them or an interesting fact.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Loves Chick-fil-A and football.

Greg Atkinson:

Right. Some kind of interesting fact about them, their favorite movie, their favorite book, favorite music. One of the reasons years ago I wrote the forward for Facebook For Pastors, and I talked about breaking down that clergy-laity wall, where you just see that pastors are real people. One of the things I used to love about some pastors I followed on social media is that they would say something as simple as, "I'm going out to cut the grass," or, "I'm taking my son to a baseball game," or, "I'm at my daughter's dance recital."

Greg Atkinson:

I think just seeing that they are a real person, "We're not the Pope, we're real person with a real family, real struggles, real life, real issues," and being able to get a little glimpse into your personality through a staff page and a bio and, "My favorite football team are the Georgia Bulldogs." That's not my team, but I'm saying I've seen pastors... "I'm an Alabama fan," or whatever your church area may be, just to get a little glimpse into them as a person I think would make people feel a little more at ease, which is my whole goal.

Greg Atkinson:

I want to turn first-time guests into second-time guests. But in order to get them to become a first-time guest, they have got to be intrigued by the church website, which as you said, they check first.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. I mean, I said that as a fact, I mean, I'm basing it on my perception. Would you say that the vast majority of visits start on the website rather than the front door these days?

Greg Atkinson:

Well, in my reporting, one of the things I talk about is I do an overall umbrella of what I call online presence. Meaning in social media as well as website. I think most people interact with your church first via social media, and second would be the website. But you can also see the human side of people through Facebook. You can see people through Instagram and through how they post. I think that is a true first door. And then, something like Instagram or Twitter or Facebook can lead you to check out their church website, which I do believe they will check out before they come in person.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right. And most people start there. Most people start online before they show up in real life. Okay. Fascinating. Okay. Well, that's really good. Let's take it a little bit further. Any other regional variations? Like some people would say, "Well, how can you possibly evaluate my church, because we're inner city or we're a city church. We're not a suburban church. Or we're country church. We're in the middle of nowhere. I mean, what would you say to that? Are there regional variations?"

Greg Atkinson:

There are. There are some things that are universal. Like I said, excellence transcends. But there are some things that are unique to an area, to a city, to a location, demographic. But in my 22... Next month, February, will be 23-year career in ministry, I've had the opportunity to serve a rural country church and

a city church and a suburban church. And so, I've got a little taste and a little feel for each of those. I've served contemporary churches, blended churches, traditional churches. And so, I've served non-denominational and Baptist churches.

Greg Atkinson:

I have a little flavor of what each feels like. I will say, like if you go to a rural country church, they tend to be a little more family-oriented, a little more into community and relationships, and I think that's a beautiful thing. What I mean by that is, when you walk in, everybody knows you're a guest. You stand out because there's this feeling of, "I've never seen that person before. I want to go get to know them. I want to introduce myself to them," especially if you're a church of 25 people. I have been to churches where I walk in and it's obvious I'm the guest.

Carey Nieuwhof:

The mystery shopper, no mystery here.

Greg Atkinson:

Right? Yeah. They may not know that I'm doing a secret shopper, but they know I'm a guest, and they recognize me, and they come over and introduce themselves. Whereas if I go into a church of 10,000, I'm not noticed. Now, hopefully I'm welcomed. Hopefully I am served well, but it's not-

Carey Nieuwhof:

But you might be one of a hundred brand new people that day.

Greg Atkinson:

Absolutely. So it's not obvious.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But most of the principles would translate. It's not like, "Well, we're so unique that nothing applies," because human are human beings. Is that what you've found?

Greg Atkinson:

It is. And hospitality, which is biblical, is hospitality. Doesn't matter if you go to a restaurant chain or a mom and pop local restaurant, that there's only one in the world, people want to be served well. They want to be taken care of. And so, like I said, excellence transcends, hospitality transcends, serving and loving others well is desired across the spectrum.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. That's really good. That leads into my next question, which is, how does this not just play into consumerism? But what you're talking about seems to suggest that, no, this is different than consumerism, give the people what they want. This is about just being gracious hosts and welcoming people on their faith journey, etc. Do you want to say anything more about that, like how this is different from consumerism?

Greg Atkinson:

I would, because I get asked that a lot, and sometimes secret shoppers take some unfair criticism. I mentioned I have a new book called *Secrets Of A Secret Shopper*, and I don't want people to think that that book is about anything consumeristic. It is about serving others well, loving others well, welcoming others, hospitality. I did a study, and it's in the introduction chapter of the book. I did a study on hospitality in the Bible, and from the Old Testament, welcoming the stranger, to the New Testament, being hospitable. Old to New Testament, we are told to be hospitable. Be hospitable. Welcome the stranger. Welcome the newcomer.

Greg Atkinson:

I was saying on another podcast recently that in Titus and in Timothy, when it lists the qualifications of an elder, hospitality is one of them. It is something thoroughly biblical. I don't see it as consumeristic at all. I see us having a biblical mandate of being hospitable to others and welcoming the stranger, welcoming the newcomer.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's great. So let's go there. What are two or three characteristics of great hospitality for any church? What are some things you should do and what are some things you should completely avoid if you want to be good at hospitality?

Greg Atkinson:

I think meeting and exceeding expectations. I would say there's no one size fits all. As you mentioned earlier, I've worked with all denominations, all sizes, from church plants to First Baptists, First Methodists, whatever. Doesn't matter the age, the size, the denomination, but meeting and exceeding expectations, removing roadblocks and barriers, allowing people to have the best experience possible. It has been well documented, the first 10 minutes are critical.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Let's go there. In terms of meeting or exceeding expectations, which specific expectations would you need to meet or exceed? To put it a different way, when the average person is walking in, let's pick unchurched. That's my bias. Churched people, they're going to heaven anyway. An unchurched person walks in what, what are the expectations they have? Some would say they're very low. They expect people to be horrible. So it's not hard to meet expectations. What do you need to meet or exceed if you're going to help an unchurched person connect?

Greg Atkinson:

That's where I go back to the biblical mandate of hospitality. I often will give the analogy of when we have company over to our house, you have to prepare for company. You have to vacuum, put away the laundry, clean the house. Sometimes we'll light a candle and have a pleasant smell in the house. We want to exceed somebody's expectations. They walk in and they think they're just coming over to talk for a little bit and we have snacks and appetizers or desserts, something that just wows them and blows them away.

Greg Atkinson:

Mark Waltz has done a lot of research and study into this in his books talking about wowing guests. And that's what I mean by exceeding expectations. Like you said, an unchurched person has very low

expectations. So I think just the very thought that we have thought through that this is somebody's first time at our church, this is somebody's first time coming to church, and we want to make it as friendly and welcoming, and we want to be as hospitable as we can be, really surprises people.

Greg Atkinson:

When a guest drives into a church parking lot and there are people out there in those red or yellow or green neon vests and they're directing traffic, it blows their mind in a good way of, "Oh my gosh, they're expecting guests to come. They're expecting people. They are welcoming. They are pointing me to the auditorium." I have been to churches where I couldn't even find the worship center because it's such a massive campus. It was so easy to get lost, that I'm just looking for somebody to point me in the right direction so that I can not miss the service.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I imagine that would happen in a small church to where the opposite is true. It's very clear. There's one door to get in, but you're wondering, "Man, this looks so small. There's 14 cars. Am I crashing someone's party?" That's where it's really nice to have somebody to say, "Hey, we're so glad to have you today," as opposed to feeling like you're barging in on a private ceremony or a wedding that you weren't invited to.

Greg Atkinson:

Absolutely. You don't want to have your back turned on where everybody there is upset that it's us four and no more and you're breaking up their huddle. You want to be welcomed graciously of, "We are so glad you're here." A lot of churches will have like a potluck dinner after church, and they'll say, "Would you stay and have lunch with us? We would love to get to know you more." A lot of churches I've seen lead volunteers and servants that will take the extra step of, when they meet somebody, they'll say, "Can I take you to lunch after church?"

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow.

Greg Atkinson:

That's next level when your volunteers and leaders are taking the initiative to say, "Hey, can I go buy you a cup of coffee? Can I take you to lunch and get to know you better? We're so glad you came." It blows me away when I see leaders in our church do that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Now, there has been a school of thought. I think this is so helpful, Greg. But there's been a school of thought over the years that says if somebody is really coming for the first time and they're unchurched or they're skeptical or whatever, that you can kind of smother them. Would you say most unchurched people would be open to an invitation like that by somebody they hadn't met? Or how does that work? Is that too much on meeting one, or you think no, actually, in an age where people want more connection, that would be a great thing to try? How does that work? What's your take on that?

Greg Atkinson:

My take, as I just briefly touched on earlier, is there's no one size fits all. I talk about a lot in my writing and in my consulting of reading body language, being able to read... I'm a hugger. I like to hug people.

And so, as a pastor, when people walked in, I would give him a hug. I would always do that Baptist side hug. But I would hug people, and I can look at somebody and tell they don't want to be touched. They don't want to be hugged. And so, I have been at churches, some very well-known churches, that I could tell you, and you would know them in a heartbeat, you would know their pastor, where I was smothered.

Greg Atkinson:

It was too many hands to shake too many greeters, too many barriers in the way of getting in the door. And so I don't want that. I think you have to-

Carey Nieuwhof:

You can smother people, even ritually-

Greg Atkinson:

Absolutely.

Carey Nieuwhof:

... through having too many welcome people, too many greeters, too many ushers, too many parking lot people. It can go over the top, even for someone who's a warm relational person like you.

Greg Atkinson:

Yeah. I mean, you can have people that are so friendly, they're suspicious. You're kind of creeped out by it if they're they're too friendly, they're smiling too much. But I think just reading body language, realizing there are some people... Every person is different and that's the beauty of the body of Christ. That's the beauty of the way God has created us. Some people will leave a church and say, "Nobody talked to me. I'm upset." Some people will go to a church and they're thinking, "Please, don't talk to me. Please don't talk to me. Please don't talk to me."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. That would be me.

Greg Atkinson:

They just want to hide. Yeah, there's introverts, there's extroverts. There's people that just want to sit down. I know when I left a church staff and became a full-time consultant and writing and coaching and doing what I'm now, and I went to our new home church, I just wanted to sit down and nobody know who I was, just be anonymous and just sit there and nobody know, "Hey, you're a pastor. You should be up on stage speaking." I just wanted to sit and worship and be served and loved on.

Greg Atkinson:

And then, eventually, I began to serve in the lead and to help. But there was a season where I just wanted to sit and be ministered to. I think we all have different expectations. I think we all have different perspectives and points of view, but the general rule would be to be hospitable.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Got you. We have this rule that I've informally heard at Connexus, greet others as they want to be greeted, not as you would greet them, because the hugger wants to hug everybody, whether the person wants to be hugged. The hand shaker or the standoffish person says, "Nobody wants to be hugged." Well, that's not true, but to read that body language. You hinted at something that I thought was really good, Greg. You said you've been smothered even at very large churches. Where's the line? What is that? Because you've got, I'm sure, some leaders alarmed right now going, "Gosh, have we crossed that line?"

Carey Nieuwhof:

I think the minimalist can go, "Okay, we could up this and be a little bit warmer." Is there an easy way to define that line of how much is too much? Is it two points of contact on the way in, somebody in the parking lot, someone at the door? How do you figure that out?

Greg Atkinson:

I do think that's a good thought, two points of contact, somebody in the parking lot, someone at the door. I wouldn't use it as a rule, but I do think it's a good thought, a good principal. There are times where, like, for example, this church I'm thinking of, is a very, very large church. I had to shake maybe 10 hands to get inside the first door, and it was just a little overwhelming and that's-

Carey Nieuwhof:

And they're all saying the same thing. "Hey, good morning. Good to see you." You're going like, "Good morning. Good to see you."

Greg Atkinson:

I'm a church person. I'm a pastor. If anybody should feel comfortable, it'd be me. But I think meeting somebody in the parking lot is huge. It is huge. I'm a real big proponent of teams and the buddy system, meaning that you can greet somebody in the parking lot and walk them into the church building, and there are still others left in the parking lot to greet others.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right. So you're not abandoning your post.

Greg Atkinson:

You're not abandoning your post. I've had people that would say, "Hi, I'm Greg. Let me walk you inside. And I see you have kids. Let me show you how to get them checked in." And they walk you from A to B to Z and get you all the way into the door. But I think there is a line that could be crossed. I think there is too much... One of the things that I've seen recently, I do this every weekend. I sit there on Sunday afternoon and I just scroll through Instagram and I see pictures of churches all around North America and what they're doing.

Greg Atkinson:

I've seen various examples of first impressions and guest services and hospitality, and the one that I see a lot by some churches, they really, really get it, that I love is people holding the signs. There are signs that say stuff like, "We're so glad you're here," or, "Welcome." There's some, depending on their personality, some said, "You look great today." They're holding these different really nice design, great

typography, really well-done signs. They're just standing on the side with a big smile saying, "Welcome, we're glad you're here." But you don't have to shake their hand. They don't rush you. They don't approach into your personal space. That there are greeters that you can shake hands with, but these are just some smiley friendly faces standing on the side.

Greg Atkinson:

I would also say, one thing I'm a big believer in is multi-generational serving. Teenagers can be great standing on the side, holding the sign. Teenagers can be great greeters. I think it's great to have people of all ages serving.

Carey Nieuwhof:

No, those are good points. Okay. Let's get practical. Well, not that this hasn't been practical. It's been very practical. But let's get specific. Somebody in the parking lot, ideally somebody who will walk you through on your first time and go, "Let me show you where you can register your kids and I'll show you where the worship auditorium is," etc, etc. You mentioned way back, and this was super helpful, a clean facility, which gets overlooked so often.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I go to a lot of different churches and it's like, "When was the last time this was vacuumed?" Or the paint is almost yellowed or the carpet hasn't been cleaned in ages, and it just feels dingy. Even things like odor and scent. I mean, we do the same thing. We light a candle before people come over or put some essential oils on or whatever. Just you want to put your best foot forward, but we forget that in church world, don't we?

Greg Atkinson:

We do. We do. I think pastors are the worst, and I don't mean that in a negative way. I just mean they are so familiar with their building that they take for granted something like the sense of smell, which is the strongest of all senses and has the strongest long-term memory. I can walk into a church and smell something and think, "This reminds me of the funeral home where my grandfather was."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yes.

Greg Atkinson:

I can have a greeter walk by, catch a whiff of her perfume and think that was the perfume that the first girl I ever dated wore or my third grade math teacher wore. You are instantly transported back in time. I've said before, bleach and mold are bad smells. Citrus, coffee, those are good smells. The sense of smell is huge. I have a whole chapter in my book just on the sense of smell. Clean facilities are huge, vacuuming.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. Toilets. Nobody wants a dirty toilet.

Greg Atkinson:

Absolutely. Nobody wants to get into a bathroom stall and have two sheets of toilet paper left and nobody thought to refill the toilet paper dispenser. That is a horrible first impression.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Who's looking at that at 6:00 AM on a Sunday? You might think, "Well, we did that Thursday before the staff took a day off," but maybe had a youth group in, or maybe you had other people in, or some community group in and you've got to reset for Sunday. In the same way, you want your sinks to be clean. It's that idea that, hopefully, even in a bathroom, you can eat off the floor. Not that you ever would, but you want that impression. Think about it. On your vacations, you got me on a passion point here, I mean, there have been times where we're on a family vacation and we stop at a gas station to use the restroom and we drive to the next one because it's a horror show. People are going to have that kind of response, just a human response, to your facility, at least in the developed world.

Greg Atkinson:

Absolutely. We were at a entertainment facility the other night. I don't know if you've heard of these experiences of people doing the escape room all over.

Carey Nieuwhof:

No. No.

Greg Atkinson:

It's all over the world. It's when they lock you in a room and you have to follow clues to find your way out, and you get locked in for an hour. We escaped with six minutes left on the clock, but a friend of mine right now is in Seoul, Korea, and he just did an escape room in Seoul, so it's all over the world. But we did one in Charlotte, and as we were waiting, I went to the restroom, and it was so clean. This is a place that, in the Halloween season, has haunted houses. They have 3D mini golf. They have pool tables, arcade, and I was not expecting a nice restroom. I went in there and it was just pristine, just perfect.

Greg Atkinson:

And so, I went out to the front where you pay, and I said, "Guys, I just want to commend you. You have an amazing restroom. It is awesome. Keep that up." I think consistency is the key. If you let it go too long, it's going to be intimidating to tackle. If you keep it clean every day, every week, it doesn't build up too much. It's the same principle with gas stations. Some of them go months without touching it. But somebody has to own that in the local church.

Greg Atkinson:

I have been a big believer for years in Ephesians 4 ministry and equipping the saints. It may not have to be the lead pastor. Now I have been on-

Carey Nieuwhof:

It better not be. Yeah.

Greg Atkinson:

Well, but I have been on staff before and have heard people say, "I have cleaned toilets." We all want to have that kind of heart where it's like, "Nothing is below me. If I need to clean the toilets, I'll clean the toilets." But in terms of good leadership, we shouldn't be the ones doing that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

No, I agree. I mean, I've cleaned toilets too, both at home and at church. But if that's what I'm doing on a Sunday morning, I have misled my staff and misled volunteers. I agree with that. I think little things like that, you think, "Well, that's not spiritual at all," but that is part of hospitality in our culture. My wife will judge a restaurant based on the quality of the bathrooms. And she'll say, "If the bathroom is dirty, I don't know whether I can trust the kitchen is any cleaner." She makes a direct connection between the state of the washrooms and the state of the kitchen. And sometimes we won't go back to a restaurant because of the bathroom.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And so, I think the point, Greg, is this. Don't make assumptions that somehow your church is exempt from that kind of analysis. What are some other keys, what are other things that people are looking for? Obviously, that would translate to kids' space? Is it safe? Is it secure? Is it clean? If you're going to leave your 18 month old crawling around on the floor, you want to know that it's okay, and it's clean, and it's safe. What are some other things in the mind of a first timer when they go through your church on day one?

Greg Atkinson:

Kids' ministry is huge. I've written a lot in the past about clean, safe, and secure. I just run through those three real quick. Clean, safe, and secure is huge. But also, the check-in process. I have been to some churches-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, let's talk about that.

Greg Atkinson:

I've been to churches where they have a huge bottleneck and it is very intimidating to get through the process of a first-time guest registering their child. And so, one of the things that I'm a big proponent of, and that I like to see, is to have a regular kiosk for regular attenders, where they come by and they do their key chain, or they type in the last four digits of their phone number, and they just come in and out real quick because they know the drill, they go through that, and then a separate desk, or kiosk, or station that says, "First-time Kids' Guests Check-in," and there's somebody friendly and confident and competent there that can greet you and say, "Hi, I'd love to get you into our system and make sure your child is safe and protected, and that nobody except you can check your child out," and explain to them some of the safety precautions that you take, to put them at ease.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Let me jump in. I'm thinking about what our team does. If you're going to overstaff an area, that's probably an area you want extra people in, as opposed to the 10 handshakes in the foyer on a Sunday morning, you would rather have a couple of extra people there. I've been to Chick-fil-A's. I've also been to other restaurants. The really good ones, if you've got a long drive-through lineup, they'll come up and

take your order before you get to the ordering window so that when you get there, you can just move right on through. That whole idea of moving people through. Good idea, bad idea? What do you think?

Greg Atkinson:

I think that's what I was referring to when I said bottleneck. You don't want to have a bottleneck. You've got to get people as efficiently and effectively as you can through the process. One of the things I've said for years with my volunteers and my lead team and my kids as a parent is the first is the worst. I've said this over and over and over. The first is the worst. The first time you do anything, it's the worst time. The first time you sing a solo, the first time you audition my kids for region band, the first time you walk into a church where it's the intimidating factor, the first time you register your kids into a system of a database of whatever church database you use, that first time is the worst and the hardest.

Greg Atkinson:

And so, whatever we can do to ease the pain, whatever we can do to make it as streamlined as possible, will help them get past that first is the worst time, so that the next time, you could say, "Hey, we've got it all taken care of. The next time you come, just type in the last four digits of your phone number and you'll be ready to go. We'll print out your stickers and you can move right along.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's where a personal touch is really helpful on the first-time visit, just to help people navigate that.

Greg Atkinson:

I always say that choosing who you put on a first impressions team or a children's ministry team is huge. It does not need to be an afterthought. It does not need to be a position that is looked down on, "Well, this person can't sing well. They don't play an instrument. They're not a good small-group leader. They're not a pastor, so let's just throw them on a greeter team." It needs to be something that is our frontline, very friendly, very competent, very welcoming people that take their role seriously because they realize what it was once like to be a guest.

Greg Atkinson:

Having people greet your kids, they should be passionate about children's ministry. You should love kids. It seems strange. It seems basic to say, but I've seen it all. I would just say, if you're serving in children's ministry, you should love kids and you should want to be there.

Carey Nieuwhof:

When you're greeting, the kind of people who will crouch down and get to know their names and do them at their eye level and in an entirely appropriate way. Okay. Family ministry, we talked about that, clean, safe, and secure. And also, the whole check-in process, no bottlenecks, people to help you navigate it, make it as easy and simple as possible, knowing that you've got to capture all this data so that you get the right kid back to the right parent at the right time. What else is a first-time guest looking for when they walk in the door?

Greg Atkinson:

I think less is more when it comes to guests. And by that, I mean, they don't want to be overwhelmed. I have walked into churches where, when they greeted me, instead of saying, "How may I help you?" or,

"Do you have a question?" or, "Let me show you where the auditorium is," or, "Let me show you how to check in your kids," I've been to churches where they hit me with a whole bunch of brochures, and announcements, and papers, and, "Here's our directory of Sunday school classes." And I'm not looking for that as a guest. And so, I think less is more.

Greg Atkinson:

I think a church has put too much into bulletins and announcements. We could do a whole different podcast on announcements and what should be in it, or do you even need it, and all of that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I think we have to because we're not even in the door of the auditorium. Pastors take note. This is all about what happens long before anybody hears the first note of the band or the welcome, or your message. How much of a first-time attender's mind is already made up before they even walk through the doors of an auditorium?

Greg Atkinson:

I usually say, this has been said by numerous people, not just myself, but within the first 10 minutes, they know whether or not they're coming back.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, and in the first 10 minutes, they're probably not in the room yet, and you certainly haven't started the service.

Greg Atkinson:

Right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow. This is so critical. They may never get to hear the message. They may never get to hear the gospel because of the stuff that we've talked about. That's pretty sobering.

Greg Atkinson:

It is. I mean, we have situations. I've done this. I don't know if you have, but I have walked into restaurants, sat down, ordered a water, looked around, and walked back out.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yep. Done it.

Greg Atkinson:

There are times there are times where you look around and you think, "This is going to be bad. I'm leaving." Who knows how many guests come into our church buildings and they look around and they think, "I'm backing out. I'm not boarding."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. Tripadvisor, I've done that. You read a bad review. You can do it even before you get there. But we pulled into the parking lot and pulled out. It's like, "No, this isn't the right spot." That's really interesting because you think, "Well, this isn't spiritual at all." Actually, it's deeply spiritual because people may never encounter... Listen, God's grace is sovereign. I understand that. I'm not going to get into a big theological debate. But at the end of the day, as far as it depends on me, if those...

Carey Nieuwhof:

A lot of pastors, let's be honest, if you're a senior leader, we delegate that stuff. We don't even check in. We don't even think about it because we're so focused on a Sunday message that quite honestly, a lot of people may never hear if we do those things poorly.

Greg Atkinson:

Yeah. Mark Waltz from Granger Church has said for years, people need to know how much they matter to us before they hear how much they matter to God. And so, I think that first 10 minutes being critical of "let's let them know that we care. Let's let them know that we were prepared for them." Some of the best churches that I've worked with anticipate guests. Now, that sounds like a no-brainer, but you would not believe how many people, how many churches and pastors and staffs and teams and volunteers just go through their Sunday motions and it's like it has never crossed their mind that this is somebody's first time at our church.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right outside our volunteer gathering area on a Sunday morning is a big deckle that says "Every Sunday is somebody's first Sunday," just as a reminder to me as a preacher, as a reminder to everybody, hey, this may be your 175th Sunday. I know that. But every Sunday is somebody's first Sunday. By the grace of God, I don't think I've preached for almost 20 years where there hasn't been a guest, but if you're not expecting guests, eventually you won't get them, right?

Greg Atkinson:

Absolutely.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay. I think you got yourself invited back for a part two down the road, Greg. This is really good. I can't believe how detailed this is, but how hyper practical. So we start in the parking lot. We get a really clean facility. You get people who ideally would walk you up. You don't smother people but you don't ignore people. You've got a really good, safe, secure check-in area. You've got people who can help you get through the bottlenecks. Minimalism is better than trying to sell people before they even know whether they want to come back.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Any thoughts on... Again, we'll do the five-minute take here and come back and do surgery later on. But let's think about any turn-on, turn-offs in the service. And then, I've got hit on what do you give your first-time guests on the way out the door? And then, I'll tell you what, we will do a part two at some point down the road. We'll talk about follow-up. We'll talk about email. We'll talk about all that. But this is good on getting them in the door.

Greg Atkinson:

Yeah. I could do a whole separate podcast on what is the essential thing that you give them. And that is the communication card. If you don't gather their info, you've missed the whole opportunity. And so, I think having a clear, concise connection card, communication card, information card, whatever you call it, that's the thing that they need to be given, not a bulletin with a hundred announcements. That's overwhelming. But what they do need to have is a connection card that they can turn in.

Greg Atkinson:

And like you said, they could turn it into a guest welcome at the end where they meet the pastor, where they're given a gift, or something like that. But you mentioned parking lot. One of the things that I would like to mention, just to put it on people's radar is accessible parking, handicap parking, things like that. A lot of times, people don't think about people that are disabled, things like having a ramp to get into the church, handicapped stalls and bathrooms, accessible parking for vans, for cars, wheelchair access, that goes with being hospitable.

Greg Atkinson:

What does it say about us if we are not welcoming to people that have struggles that we can't relate to, struggles that you don't meet. I have somebody I could recommend to you that could do a whole separate podcast, because that's his area of expertise. That's Dr. Chester Goad. He does a really in-depth... He opened my eyes to things that a secret shopper should be looking for as far as accessibility for all people.

Carey Nieuwhof:

For reserved parking, would you add like... I've seen churches and we've done it at times, single-mom parking, or young families, or new... Well, young families would be a third of our parking lot, but anyway. So much for that idea. But what about even first-time guests, flash your lights, or honk your horn, or park here? What do you think about that, or is that over the top?

Greg Atkinson:

No, I like that. I live in Charlotte and that's the base of Elevation Church, Steven Furtick. They do first impressions like nobody else I've ever seen. They have where you flash your lights, first-time guest parking, VIP parking. They just knock it out of the park. You get a free t-shirt. I have visited there numerous times. I have three different Elevation t-shirts. I just collect them. But I think it's good. Now, it all depends on the size of your church. If you're a church of 25 people, then you don't need to have, "Flash your lights if you're a first-time guest," because the parking lot is not going to be that big.

Greg Atkinson:

But if you have a campus and you have... Like I've been the churches, I've served churches where they have parking decks. And it is extremely confusing to get into the church. And so, one church I worked with had three parking decks, and one of them was for first-time guests. I drove in through one of the other two that was not for first-time guests and I said, "I missed the whole experience because you need to have something for first-time guests in each of them." I said, "Don't expect that they're going to know which parking deck to park into if they are guests."

Greg Atkinson:

But I think flashing their lights is great. I think having people... One of my pet peeves, and I had to touch on this, one of my pet peeves is parking lot attendants grouped up together talking to one another.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh yeah. Basically having their morning coffee break.

Greg Atkinson:

Yes. Parking lot attendants need to be spread out across the parking lot, talking through a walkie talkie system with ear pieces in. They need to be spread out and using hand signals and walkie talkies. But if I see them grouped up with three guys huddled together talking, that is the biggest turnoff. That is the biggest slap in the face to guests, when you have your back turned to them and you're in deep conversation, and you don't even notice them. I've seen it time and time again.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, and I have that, when I go into a store and I want a question answered, and there's two or three employees who are talking to each other, and you're standing there, and they're annoyed that you're there. I'm like, "No, the reason I'm here is the reason you have a job. I am your job. Your job is not to talk to each other about what happened Friday night or what you're doing tomorrow. Your job is to serve the customer." I get very frustrated with that. So I totally understand that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay, well, Greg, this is amazing. We're almost at the hour mark. So this is definitely a... You're going to come back at some point in the next year and we'll finish this conversation. You did hint at welcome card. I'm just going to ask you point blank. Do you have a template for some of the essential things you should always get or never get that we could share with listeners? Do you have one that we could share with people by any chance? Or could we create one? Because I know that's what people would love. We mentioned the welcome card and what's essential.

Greg Atkinson:

Yeah. I could get one created to get to you for when this airs, you could have it downloadable. I did one for Church Marketing Sucks and the Center For Church Communication. But it was for their paid membership site. It's not just easily to find, but I could create a different one for you. Like for example, I like a little check box, one that says first-time guest, one that says second-time guest. That's going off on Nelson Searcy's book, Fusion. If we're not tracking second-time guests, we have missed a huge, huge thing.

Greg Atkinson:

Again, going back to Charles Spurgeon book on the Holy Spirit and seeing God at work, if somebody has returned for a second-time guest visit, that is huge. And that means they are intrigued. They are interested. You didn't scare them off the first time. Those are the people that we need to assimilate, and focus on, and follow up with those second-time guests.

Greg Atkinson:

I worked with even my own home church here, I was in a staff meeting and they were coming up with new communication cards. They showed me the design for what they were going to get printed and it

just said, "First-time guest" I said, "You need to track second-time guests." And they said, "Well, we don't track that." I looked them dead in the eye and I said, "You need to. You need to." We need to know...

Greg Atkinson:

When I was on staff at Transformation Church with Derwin Gray, on their connection card, it said, first-time guest, second-time guest, third-time guest. Each group had different letters that get sent out depending on what type of guest you are. I also like to say, "How did you hear about us? Facebook, social media, direct mail piece, friend invited me, drove by saw the road sign?" You need to have metrics to know what's working. But at the same time, you don't want it to be a book.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, yeah. You don't want a 17-page card and-

Greg Atkinson:

Right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So you've got to keep it simple. Well, that would be great if you could do it. I know that will be downloaded many, many times, and just to even give us the metrics. I mean, your graphic team, or however, you can design it according to your branding. But generally, a single sheet of paper like a card stock that fits into your hand, that you can fill out pretty quickly. We will create that, Greg, and I want to thank you. I know listeners will be really anxious to get ahold of your new book too. The final title for it, we're recording this several months in advance, but it's called *The Secrets Of A Secret Shopper*.

Greg Atkinson:

That's right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's cool, by Greg Atkinson.

Greg Atkinson:

Yeah. I want to say, the heart behind it... And I mean, this as sincerely as I can say it, I realize that most churches in North America are 200 people or less, and they don't have the budget to bring in an outside consultant and to hire a secret shopper as much as they would like to. So I got together with Rainer Publishing and I said, "What if we create a book that tells people everything I look for so they can pay 10 bucks, get a book, and save all the money that it would take to fly in me and put me in a hotel and hire me to do this?" The heart behind it was to serve small church leaders-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Love it.

Greg Atkinson:

... and allow them to be able to secret shop their own church.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You and I have a similar heart. That's why I'm producing more and more online resources because the vast majority of churches can't even afford to fly somebody in. And yet, for a few dollars or a hundred bucks, you can get something into everybody's hand. If you're doing a course or something like that, that can just make a big difference. I love that. I love your heart, and I hope a lot of you go out and buy Greg's book. He is into really helping you guys, and I think that's great.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So we'll have that in the show notes, as well as a lot of the tips that we talked about today. Your book is available everywhere you can buy books like Amazon, etc. etc.?

Greg Atkinson:

Right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Great. Well, Greg, thank you. That was amazing. I know that a lot of you will be sharing this information with your guest services team, with your staff. Greg, we're going to have you back in the next year and we'll take it up if we ever get in the auditorium. What the heck is that like, and where do we go from there, and how do we follow up? I've been taking notes, a lot of them as well. So thank you so much, Greg.

Greg Atkinson:

You're welcome. I would just say, in closing, I think what you have at your church is amazing. And if every church leader that listens to this could create some type of sign that says, "Every Sunday is somebody's first-time Sunday," and hang that in a green room, or backstage, or where volunteers gather, or in your office before you go out and to preach, that is key. If I could wrap everything up, is just being ready and acknowledging that every Sunday is somebody's first-time Sunday. And so, that's huge. That's huge.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I'm really proud of our team. They're committed to that at Connexus church. We have been for years, and they embody that every week. We don't always get it right. We make mistakes, but the heart is there and they're doing unbelievable things. So I'm really proud of our team for that. Greg, thank you so much, man. Really, you've built into so many leaders today and I know you've helped a lot of churches reach more people, which is pretty close to my heart too. Thanks, Greg.

Greg Atkinson:

Awesome. Thank you for having me.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, cool. You're like, "Hey, what are the show notes again?" Remember, Greg decided to do this. He decided to provide you with all the information that you need to collect from your first-time visitors, and you can find that in the show notes at careynieuwhof.com/episode132. If you found this helpful, I would encourage you to let us know. Let us know by leaving a rating or review on iTunes or Google Play, Stitcher, TuneIn Radio. Maybe share it with a friend, share it on social media.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I just want to say thank you to all of you who are doing this. The podcast continues to grow month after month. I just love helping leaders, and thanks for helping us do that. Thank you for your kind words and your encouragement. I promise you, I read every review, all your emails. You guys, you're the best. You really, really are. Just a reminder, head on over to rethinkleadership.com if you haven't yet decided to join us in Atlanta at the end of April, and trainedup.org if you are passionate about training and equipping the people that you recruit to ministry.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Hey, we are back next week with a brand new episode. That's what happens when you subscribe, is you don't even have to think about it. It just shows up on your phone automatically. Who have we got for you next week? Well, we got a fascinating guest. I mean, nobody talks to leadership quite like Todd Adkins, and here's a snippet from next week's episode.

Todd Adkins:

I think a really good question is this, Carey, and that is: can I tell you? Yes, I can tell you when I came to know Christ. Can I tell you when I moved from being a doer to a developer? When did I have that experience? When did I have that conversion as a leader? I mean, I can go back and tell you. And I think a lot of times, if somebody is a doer versus developer, it's because they haven't had that transformative experience that really shifts in there. We're not just called to be disciples. We're called to make disciples.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Make disciples.

Todd Adkins:

And that's not just as pastors. That's everybody. That's a great commission.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Next week it's Todd Adkins on why most churches do a bad job at leadership development and how to turn that around. It's going to be a great episode. Again, if you subscribe for free, you'll have it on your phone first thing Tuesday morning. We've got Warren Bird and Carl George coming up. Bob and Maria Goff are scheduled to be on the podcast. Got a bit of an online series, miniseries, with Steve Fogg and Justin Dean coming up, Adam Weber, lots of other people coming up. It's going to be a lot of fun. We will talk to you next Tuesday. Thanks so much for listening and I really 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.