

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 389 of the podcast. My name is Carey Nieuwhof and I hope our time together helps you lead like never before. Happy New Year. And we thought there was no better way to kick off a brand new year than to start it with Andy Stanley. We're going to talk about decision making.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And today's episode is brought to you by BELAY. You can text the word Carey, my name, C-A-R-E-Y, to 31996, to get their free download of BELAY's delegation planner and start reclaiming your free time. Who doesn't want a better year this year? And by Pro Media Fire. Book your free digital strategy session today at [promediafire.com/churchgrowth](http://promediafire.com/churchgrowth).

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, so excited to have Andy back on the podcast, if you're a regular listener. And welcome to all of you who are new this year. Maybe you're trying a new habit. I am a podcaster and also a podcast listener, a listener for longer than I have been a podcaster. So what we try to do here is we try to break down the story behind leadership. We try to take you behind the scenes and ask the questions behind the questions and interview the top leaders we know. And that's what we're doing with Andy. So we dissect the process he uses to make decisions, the limits of gut-based decision making. But also where that really comes in handy, and how to stop lying to yourself as a leader.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Andy is a communicator, author, pastor, and founder of Atlanta-based North Point Ministries. They now have seven churches in metro Atlanta, a global network of 100 partner churches. And his teachings have been featured around the world, including on NBC and CBS. And as of 2020 his messages are accessed more than 10.5 million times each month via television and podcast. So he has a passion for engaging with live audiences. He's spoken at leadership events around the world for decades, including Catalyst, Leadercast, and the WCA Global Leadership Summit. Andy and Sandra live in Atlanta. And he's also been a really good friend and mentor to me over the last 15 years. So Andy, it's just a joy to have you back on the podcast.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And we are really excited for this year. Normally I'd tell you this toward the end, we've got some great guests. Seth Godin is going to join us for the podcast. We also have Rob Pelinka, the general manager of the L.A. Lakers, who will be on very soon. Craig Groeschel, Rachel Cruze, Hannah Brencher. Who else? John Kotter from Harvard Business School, and many others. I'm really excited. This is going to be, I think, the best year yet for the podcast. So if you're new to it, welcome. If you haven't subscribed, please do that. That's what I do. I listen to the podcasts I subscribe to.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And as Rob and I were talking about, from the Lakers, he's got a very busy job but he listens in the cracks. So when he's on his commute, when he's doing stuff around the house. So we bring you these long-form interviews to deconstruct leadership for you. But I find that I often enjoy them most when I'm out for a run or a bike ride or mowing the lawn or that kind of thing. Anyway, we're really glad to have you. Welcome to the tribe. And if you enjoy it, leave a rating and review.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So you're probably setting priorities for this year, and digital is going to be bigger than ever. So do you have a creative or a digital staff member you want to hire at your church? There are a couple of options. Number one, you can hire an internal staff member that's an expert in one or two main areas. Or you can hire Pro Media Fire and then you get an entire team of experts for less than the cost of a single professional staff hire. With Pro Media Fire you save on employee taxes, health insurance that you would normally have to pay if you have internal staff. And turnover becomes a thing of the past with a team that handles all your creative and digital needs. The choice is yours. So you can hire one person, or get a whole team of pros providing digital strategy and a creative framework to help your church grow online. Teams win championships. So you can book a free strategy session today at [promediafire.com/churchgrowth](http://promediafire.com/churchgrowth).

Carey Nieuwhof:

And also, if you're thinking about your time like I do all the time, but especially in January. Last year was complicated. What if you could have more time every week? So if you want to think of a few tasks you can delegate, maybe emails or scheduling or booking travel or planning meetings or expense reporting, delegation is something a lot of leaders struggle with, but BELAY can help you with it. They're the incredible organization revolutionizing productivity, with their virtual assistant, book keeping, and social media strategist services for churches, not for profits, and for businesses. And they're offering a free download of their delegation planner today. All you have to do is text the word Carey, my name, to 31996, to get a free download of BELAY's delegation planner. And you can start reclaiming your free time today.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So hey, without further ado, let me bring you a fascinating conversation with Andy Stanley.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well Andy, welcome back. It's great to have you on the podcast.

Andy Stanley:

I appreciate you inviting me on your podcast. And it's always good to see you. We used to see each other more, but this is great. So thanks.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. I haven't flown anywhere since March.

Andy Stanley:

Oh really? Well actually I haven't either. I hear it's been less crowded and now people are-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Starting to pick up a little bit.

Andy Stanley:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Do you miss it? Is there any part of that, getting on airplanes and the whole thing, that you miss?

Andy Stanley:

I do not like to travel unless I'm going somewhere fun. And I'm fortunate, living in a big city, as you know, so many events happen here. Our standard line is, "Hey, Andy can't come. But if you ever have your event in Atlanta, please call us again." I don't know. It's just not my favorite thing to do.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. I hear ya. It's been a big reset for me, but not one that I'm hating, by any stretch. I hope to get out, to some extent, in the future. But you know, it's not so bad. Andy, you-

Andy Stanley:

Actually, you know what.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What?

Andy Stanley:

I'm going to be headed up to visit with Bruxy. It's, I think, my first flight. It's not until January. So I'm looking forward-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Seriously?

Andy Stanley:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Bruxy Cavey at The Meeting House. That's like an hour from my house. You're kidding.

Andy Stanley:

Oh really?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Andy Stanley:

I'm going to try to be there in January. I've never met him personally. He's an online friend. And I just love that guy. And we were going to do something like this and I said, "You know what, I would just love to come see what you're doing." So I'll be up in your neck of the woods.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well that's amazing. I've known Bruxy for years. His former lead pastor and I are really, really good friends, Tim. But no, they're doing great stuff at The Meeting House. And has made a huge contribution internationally too. Well that's fun, Andy.

Andy Stanley:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Let's talk about decision making. So your new book, Better Decision, Fewer Regrets talks about a new framework for decision making. It's a great book. I'd love to go back to younger Andy, and how you made decisions as a young leader. As you know, like on your platform, we've got a lot of young leaders listening. So I'd love to talk about the evolution, if you can use that word, of decision making in your life. How did it start out and how has it changed?

Andy Stanley:

Well I'll ... Stop me if I head off on too much of a rabbit trail. In the book actually I start with this story about my dad, who had this terrible habit. And his habit was he wouldn't answer my questions or he wouldn't help me figure out what to do, or he wouldn't tell me what to do. I think he might've started too early with this, honestly. I've tried to do this with my kids. But early on I would say, "Dad, what do you think I should do?" And he would say, "Well, what do you think you should do?" And then he would say this, "Well what if I weren't here to help you," or, "What if I weren't here to tell you?" And I would always say, "But you are to help me and you are here to tell me." And he wasn't trying to neglect his role as a father. He was trying to teach me, early on, how to make good decisions.

Andy Stanley:

And then his default, early on ... It's amazing, as a parent, when I think about the freedom he gave me. He would say, "Well why don't you pray about it, and whatever you feel like God wants you to do, just do that." And my mom would be like, "No. No, no. No. It's too early. Who knows what he's going to think God told him." But he was so great about, and here's the key, pushing the responsibility and the consequence of the decision and the freedom to make the decision, back in my court. And of course he did this when the stakes were very, very low, when I was a child, middle school and high school. And so consequently I just grew up with the appropriate pressure to understand the importance of making good decisions. And early on understood that really my decisions, and this is true for all of us, my decisions are like the steering wheel of our lives.

Andy Stanley:

We are where we are, for the most part, because of decisions we've made, or decisions other people have made about us or for us that we have then responded to with our own decisions. So either way you cut it, our decisions, they determine the direction and the quality of our lives. So I was fortunate to

early on not be left on my own to make decisions, but to grow up with a dad and a mom, after she got onboard with this, to say, "Hey, well what would you do if I wasn't here?" And so that's the early part.

Andy Stanley:

In terms of the leadership part, and you and I have known each other a while and I feel like you're the same way. I learned in leadership that the goal wasn't to make the decision. Leaders get a little confused about this, especially young leaders. Leadership is not about making decisions. Leadership is about making sure that the decisions that are made are the right decisions. So the leader that feels like, "Oh since I'm the leader I'm supposed to make the decisions," no, that's not leadership. That's generally a bad idea. So great leaders surround themselves with people who are smarter than they are, right.

Andy Stanley:

Jim Collins said, "Aspire to be the dumbest person in the room." I heard him say that one time at a conference, "Aspire to be the dumbest person in the room." So in terms of leadership, listening and learning from people who are smarter than us, or who have insight we don't have, that's the way forward. And then, as the leader, I have to own the decision. I have to stand up front, and I take all the bullets, or in some cases, too much credit for decisions that have been made.

Andy Stanley:

So those are the underpinnings of my experience. And then, again, never feeling the pressure, as a leader, to feel like I'm the one who has to make the decisions. I'm the one who has to own it and then take responsibility for it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You know, Andy, I don't know whether you go into this in the book. But just because we have known each other for a long time and I know your circle and everything like that, it's interesting because you became a lead pastor when you were what? In your late 30s, mid-30s kind of thing, when you started North Point.

Andy Stanley:

37, 38.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. 37, 38. And prior to that you worked with your dad. But a lot of the team that you had when you worked on your dad's staff is the team that went on to start North Point. And a lot of them are still there today, to this day.

Andy Stanley:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

The reason I'm thinking about this, you just made me think about it in the way you were framing the answer to the question. Have you been a team-based decision maker almost since day one in leadership, even when you were in student ministry? Can you talk about that?

Andy Stanley:

Yes. When people ask me this question here's what I traditionally say. And it's true. I really don't have enough confidence in my ability to make solo decisions. It's not so much a leadership strategy, even though I think it's a good one, to not just build consensus but to just listen, as I have become famous for saying. I don't remember where I first said it, "Leaders who refuse to listen will eventually be surrounded by people who have nothing helpful to say." If you refuse to listen, eventually the people who have something to say, they go somewhere else because who wants to work for somebody who's not willing to listen or to receive feedback?

Andy Stanley:

So consequently that has been something I've done for a long time. And honestly, Carey, I was ... You know the people I was surrounded by, Reggie Joiner and Bill Willits and Lane Jones and Julie Arnold and others. I was surrounded by extraordinary people who in their sphere really, genuinely were more ... they were smarter and had greater insight into their lane than I did. So why in the world would I feel like I have to be the leader in all the lanes and try to lead in areas where I don't have competence? Because again, the goal is to get in our lane, stay there. That's where we make the greatest value add. And to let the other people drive their lanes. Support them, remove obstacles, but not try to make decisions for them.

Andy Stanley:

So early on at North Point I was surrounded by some really, really great people, smart people, people who hey just give them the resources, get out of the way, watch them go. And make sure everybody gets the credit they're due. So I've never felt the pressure, "Oh, you're the leader. You need to make all the decisions." But, going back to what I said, at the end of the day, once the decision is made, I'm the one that stands up and announces it. The buck stops with me. And I take 100% ownership, but never 100% of the credit. That's how I've rolled. And again, part of it isn't just, again, a leadership strategy. Part of it, I think, is insecurity in my ability to make a solo decision.

Andy Stanley:

Except for a few occasions, very few occasions where I just knew. And I think every leader who has any kind of leadership intuition has these moments. Don't claim to have them too often. Please don't say, "God told me." Just every once in a while you just know. And when you have those moments you just say to your staff or you say to your team, "I'm sorry, this is something I just know we need to do. This is what we're going to do." That's happened maybe three times in 25 years at North Point Community Church. So that is not my style of leadership. And I think because of that, in those few moments, the staff around me are like, "Okay. This is different. This isn't Andy just trying to have his way." And those three occasions, I was correct. But that is not the norm, believe me.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I don't want to put you on the spot, but what would an example of one of those times be, when you just kind of knew? It's like, "Okay, this is it."

Andy Stanley:

Well one of them we talked about recently was the decision to not have Sunday morning services from the end of July to the end of the year. I just knew this is what we need to do. And I went into the

meeting with 15 people thinking I might have to convince them. But I really don't like to convince sharp leaders of anything. I want everybody to feel the freedom. I don't want them to feel like I came in with an agenda. So I came in with three options, tried to be as neutral as I possibly could. And as I shared before, Clay Scroggins said, "Well I think." And I'm like that's it that's where I hope this conversation landed because I just sensed this is the thing to do.

Andy Stanley:

The other time was we had a lead pastor who had a moral failure. This is years ago. And he was the lead pastor at one of our big churches, they're all kind of big. And the day after ... I had met with him that night, late into the night and tried to figure out what's next for him. I was sitting on my couch and I knew, Andy, you need to step into his role and become the lead pastor of that local church. So I said, "Sandra, here's what I need to do." And she said, "Well what about your other jobs?" I said, "I don't know, but I just know with certainty I need to show up Sunday, explain what's happened, and then step into his role." And so I did. And I have served as lead pastor there for ... Well actually a little over two years, and loved every minute of it. And it was helpful to me. And the other jobs got done.

Andy Stanley:

But those occasions are few and far between. But, as leaders, you got to listen to that still small voice or that instinct. But day to day, I don't lead that way.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So Andy, this is fascinating. You've only done that a handful of times. And one of them, by the way, we can link back in the show notes to the interview I did, David Kinnaman and I did with you about the decision to close the churches until 2021 for in-person gatherings.

Andy Stanley:

Well we don't say close the churches. We say we don't meet on Sunday mornings shoulder to shoulder in a building. So, yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

There you go, to stay open online until 2021.

Andy Stanley:

Well yeah. Thank you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay. But what I'm interested in drilling down on, Andy, is you walked into the room with the decision you kind of knew, but you let the team make the decision. So I went through The 4 Disciplines of Execution about a year ago with my staff, which actually prompted in part by a series of interviews you did on your leadership podcast with, I think it's Chris McChesney, is that his name?

Andy Stanley:

Chris, yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. Anyway, it was really good. It made me dig into the book again. And I'm like, "Ah, we got to do this." And you've got to come up with a wildly important goal. And I led my team through a retreat with it and I'm like, "Oh, please pick this one. Please pick this one." But I didn't want to drive it, right.

Andy Stanley:

Right. Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And sure enough, after a day they picked exactly what I would've picked, and maybe got a little more aggressive with it. There's a lot of leaders who wouldn't wait that long. I wonder if you could just speak to the dynamic of walking into a meeting where you kind of knew where you wanted everyone to do. But what is a benefit of letting the team get their on their own?

Andy Stanley:

Well this is a really important segment of our conversation. Most of your viewers or listeners are somewhat familiar with Enneagram. And Enneagram eights are really, really, really good decision makers. I am not an eight. I'm a one. Eights are good decision makers, but they are impatient. And they are able to see what needs to be done, generally quicker than everybody else. But their problem is, unless they have a lot of maturity, is they're not willing to wait for everyone to catch up with them.

Andy Stanley:

And I actually have two eights that have been in my inner circle for quite some time, one from the very beginning. And I actually have had to sit down with him, early early on, and this is what I said. It's Rick Holliday. Rick is brilliant. He is so smart. I've known Rick since college. I would sit in the middle on the front row and take notes. Rick would sit against the wall so he could put his head against the wall and go to sleep in class, and straight A's. He is so brilliant. And he gets to what needs to happen so quickly.

Andy Stanley:

But in the early years, when we were first starting, he did what we all did. It's like, "Well why can't everybody see as clearly as I can see?" And I would say, "Rick, please just give the rest of us time to catch up with you. Because you're rarely ever wrong." And to the point of your question, if people don't have time to process and walk out of a room with some ownership, then, as you know, the execution just doesn't happen the way that it should. But when a group is galvanized around being either slowly and appropriately convinced, or at least convinced enough to say, "You know what, even though I'm not 100%, I'm 80% or I'm 90%, and let's just do this."

Andy Stanley:

There has to be ownership for us to own, not just the decision, but then you know how it is in organizational life, you make a decision but that's the easy part. Now you got to do all this work, make all these changes. So allowing the core people, the core team to have input and to feel like there's ownership. We're not being duplicitous. This isn't some sort of scam. This is just good leadership. And of course you always learn things along the way. So for people like me, it comes a little natural to go slow, make sure I've got all the cards on the table, that I've pulled everybody into the conversation. For other people, they just know.

Andy Stanley:

Now one more thing on that. When I learned, through Enneagram study, how good and how quick reds are, excuse me, eights are. And if you think in terms of temperament, the high D or the red temperament. When I discovered that, I have leveraged that. And when we're trying to make a decision that's going to take days or weeks, I will go to those red eights or those eights and say, "Okay, what are you thinking? What are you thinking?" And when a couple of eights, or as we call them, red eights, when they're in sync that's generally the right decision. Then it's up to me to shepherd everybody in that direction.

Andy Stanley:

For those of you who say, "Hey, you're talking about me. I just see it quicker than everybody else." That is a gift. Use it. Leverage it. But make sure you bring the team along. And if you're not the team leader, use that to help your team leader. Because sometimes team leaders just need the confidence to get the team across the line, in terms of actually making the decision. So all of these things come together when a leader's patient enough to allow them to come together.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I would just say to young leaders-

Andy Stanley:

Sorry to go so long on that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

No. No. No. No. This is a master class. So I'm an Enneagram eight. I wish someone had told me that when I was 30.

Andy Stanley:

Why?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Because I would walk in the room, and you're right, you just kind of ... And you're wrong sometimes, but you're right a lot. And it's just an intuition thing. And Andy, I steamrolled over people in my 30s, and just kind of like, "This is where we're going to go." And you don't get the buy-in that you do when even on that day when you walked in and thought "I know where this decision needs to go, but I'm going to let these people buy-in," and Clay spoke up and others spoke up and said, "This is what we should do." And you're like, "Okay." That took me forever to learn. So you just saved a lot of heartbreak and a bunch of resignations.

Andy Stanley:

At some point here you should talk about that. Because for young leaders, here's what happens. If I can go back. Late 20s, early 30s, mid-30s, if you're wired the way you are, and it's not an arrogance or pride thing, you come to the conclusion pretty quickly, I think I'm smarter than most people. I think I'm smarter than most people in this room, and they're all older than me. These old people ... and suddenly that gift, that intuition that is so valuable becomes a liability because you learn less, you don't stick around as long. And people consider you a trouble maker. And instead of coming to you for advice,

which they should, it's like, "Oh, he's so contrary and he always has to talk." And for people with strong personalities, it's easy to shut other people down.

Andy Stanley:

So for young leaders, this conversation is so important, and may be something to followup on later on.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I think you're on to something there. Because it's easy, and sometimes it comes across as arrogance, definitely. You got to watch this. But sometimes it comes off as just, "Why don't these people get it? What is wrong?" Right?

Andy Stanley:

Right. Yes. That's how it comes across.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Why can't people see it. So let me ask you this, if you don't mind. So let's not talk about the big three decisions. But let's just say you come in, you're a quality ... And Les McKeown, who I think you know, would say, "Quality, team-based decision making is the key to scaling. You can't do it without quality, team-based decision." If it's your way or the highway, you're kind of out. You're never really going to grow.

Andy Stanley:

Right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But let's say you walk into a meeting, it's just a normal meeting. It's a normal Tuesday at leadership team. And you kind of have a sense of where things are going. It's not a hill to die on. But where is a line for you where you let the team make the decision or you walk in and say, "I don't think so." Because ultimately you have to sell it, right? You're the person with the microphone, trying to raise money or people, or justify the decision. Do you have a line or a working knowledge about when you pull out the veto card or the redirection card?

Andy Stanley:

That's a good question. I have been out-voted, so to speak, by our elders, twice. And on both occasions they were really big decisions and I was the one that had to step up on a Sunday morning to our campus or campuses and say, "This is what we've decided. This is what we're going to do." And in both cases I disagreed, but I trusted the process. And this is another big lesson, right. If you have a good process ... I say to leaders all the time, "Look, trust the process. Just let the process play out." If you have a board and it's a talented board and you have the right people, if you have a group of elders and it's the right group of elders, listen and just trust the process.

Andy Stanley:

Again, on those two occasions. One was something we were going to put in our building. And the other one was basically a whole building. Because we were going to end up doing two capital campaigns at one time and I'm like, "No. This is financial suicide." And our board was like, "No, we can do this." And

I'm like wait a minute. And this is what I told them. I said, "Do you realize we can make this decision. I can announce it. We can announce and launch two, multi-million dollar capital campaigns and then the next day all of you guys can resign and disappear into the dark of night and the headline will be, "Andy Stanley bankrupts North Point Community Church because of this hair brained idea he had of trying to raise too much money." I said, "So I'm listening, and I want to be open. But you realize, this sits on my shoulders."

Andy Stanley:

So I kiddingly said, "So, none of you guys can leave the church until all this money is raised." But they said, "No, we can do this." And you know what, I just decided I'm going to trust the process. This group of men and women are here for a purpose. They see it. It was unanimous. I was the only outlier. I said, "Okay. Let's do it." I stepped up, led it as if it were my idea. And it worked and they were correct. And I was wrong. And if I had had my way, it wouldn't have destroyed the organization, but it would have slowed us down tremendously. And for me it was just fear and the horror stories of what happens to churches when they bite off more than they can chew. We're both familiar with those stories.

Andy Stanley:

So I say trust the process. If you have a good process, trust it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I don't want to keep going down a direction if it's not helpful, but how did you, in those situations, do the job of convincing your congregation that was the right decision? Because you almost had to sell yourself, right? You were outvoted 12-1 or 8-1 or whatever the number was, and now you got to stand up. And you can't have a plastic smile on your face. You got to believe it. It's got to come from your heart. How did you do that?

Andy Stanley:

Well in that particular case I went down to Buckhead church that was meeting in a grocery store, and cast a vision for their capital campaign. Then back at North Point to cast a vision for the capital campaign to build a building 20 miles north of us. So it was two different congregations. But again, they were each going to do their own three year in capital campaign. And I'm like, "Oh, brother. Here we go." And the smart men and women who were the numbers people looked at our financials and said, "We can do this." And I'm like, "All right." So off we went.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Maybe it's just because I'm an Enneagram eight, but I would lie there at night thinking "that was a really dumb decision, and now I'm backed in this corner and how am I going to sell it." Did that dynamic cross your mind? How did you get through it?

Andy Stanley:

No. But honestly, I trusted this group. So I just felt like God has spoken, this is the process, this is how it works.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's good, Andy. And people who hang around you, I've heard this so many times, it's like, "Andy's a great communicator, but he's an even better leader." And I think we're cracking that open right now and trying to see the process behind it. So thank you for that and thank you for being so open and transparent.

Carey Nieuwhof:

One of my favorite lines, I think this was in another book. You might remember. I've quoted it a million times. It's that "people make emotional decisions and backfill them with logic." You know, I got my new car. It cost me \$50,000. But it's better on gas. It's like, that's not a financial decision. That's an emotional decision that you backfill with logic. In your new book you pick that up and talk about selling yourself on a bad decision. Can you explain the dynamic behind it? Because that is so true.

Andy Stanley:

Yeah, so in the book basically what I do is provide readers with five questions to ask every time they're making an important decision. Because, and this is one of the things I learned from my dad as well, there is an extremely important relationship between questions and decisions. And we don't often connect these dots. Here's when we connect them. We connect them on the backside of a bad decision. We make a bad decision and we say to ourselves or to someone else, "I should have asked more questions." Right. "I should have been more curious."

Andy Stanley:

So in the book I basically say I'm going to give you five questions to add to your arsenal of questions that you should ask every single time you make a big decision. And one of the reasons this is so important is because we all have an internal salesperson that constantly is selling us on what it is we have decided we want to do. Because we think we are rational beings and make rational decisions. So once we have gotten our heart all entangled with something or someone, we say to our brains, "Hey brains, I need some justification because I can't make an emotional decision." And our brains are so smart, that's why they're brains, and our brains come up with all kinds of reasons for the decisions that we make. But they're not really reasons, they're justifications, as you just said.

Andy Stanley:

So one of the most important things, especially in leadership, for us to do, is to get in the habit of telling ourselves the truth. Because you would never hire a liar. You fire a liar. And yet for all of us there is a little liar that lives on the inside of us, that lies to us about why we're doing what we're doing. So the sooner we can call the liar out and become leaders who are honest with ourselves, the better we are in every arena of life. But really especially leadership.

Andy Stanley:

And it comes back to something we've talked about before, Carey, and that is self-leadership. And you can't lead other people well until you lead yourself well. And you can't lead yourself well if you're lying to yourself. So part of the book is to help us learn how to shut down the internal salesman or salesperson. And one of the things I say in the book is this, "You almost never have to sell yourself on a good idea." So as soon as we sense that we're selling ourselves, it's generally a bad idea. There we've gone again, we've gotten our heart entangled with something and we've got our brain going to work to justify what it is that we've got our heart set on. So being honest with ourselves is perhaps the best decision-making habit, but it's one of the hardest.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Before we get into the five questions. When you sent me the book I wasn't 100% sure. You did Best Question Ever, which is a great book. And some of those ideas are in here. But it's a fresh set of questions. It's a fresh selection of questions. And I'm curious, how did you develop the process behind the book, in collecting these ideas? Are these things you've collected over the years? Is it further refined? I'd just love some of the backstory to how these became the five questions.

Andy Stanley:

Well one is a question my dad asked me my whole life, we'll get to that in a few minutes. Two of them are questions I found myself asking my children early on, and so we'll get to those as well. One of them just comes straight out of this, I don't know, somewhat of an evolution that we've been going through as a group of churches for about 10 years, in terms of Jesus' New Covenant command and how central that needs to be in all of our lives.

Andy Stanley:

So it has been a collection of things over time. And you know how this is, you have a theme in your life sometimes, but you don't have words for it. And then later on, what has been there along, you finally find words for it. So some of these questions are a little bit of that. But these are not new. Again, they're things I was raised on, things I've tried to teach my kids. And again, anybody who reads the book, they're intuitive. But again, and this is why the book's so important, knowing the right thing to do has absolutely nothing to do with whether or not we do the right thing. But again, in our minds we think, "Well once I know, I'll do." But that's not true, otherwise we would all eat right and we would all exercise consistently. Right? But we don't. It's a falsehood. The correlation between, "Oh now I know, so now I'll do," it's not there. Because we're so good at selling ourselves on bad ideas.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I love the line, I underlined it in my copy of the book, "You can't lead yourself if you're lying to yourself." That's so true. What are some of your disciplines to stay ruthlessly honest with yourself, Andy?

Andy Stanley:

Well it really comes down to the first of the five questions. And I ask myself this question and I ask ... This is weird. I ask myself this question out loud. And the question is, "am I being honest with myself?" And then I add the word "really." More specifically, "why am I doing this, really? Why am I deciding this, really? Why am I purchasing this, really? Why am I doing this, really?" I know what I've told everybody else. I know what I've told myself. But come on, it's just the two of us in the mirror. Andy. Even if you don't follow through, be honest with yourself. Why are you doing this, really?

Andy Stanley:

And one of the little exercises I do in the book is I say to readers, I say, "Imagine going into a retail outlet and a salesperson saying out loud to you the things that you say to yourself in your head." You would be so offended. Imagine somebody in a retail context saying, "Hey, if you get home and don't like it, just donate it." Who would say that? Or how about this, "You know, this one is pretty much exactly like the one you already have, only this one's newer." What kind of sales pitch is that? But it's the kind of thing we tell ourselves all the time.

Andy Stanley:

So once you can get it out there in the real world and see it and think about it, we realize we're not really good salespeople, we just fall for the most ridiculous sales pitches when we're pitching ourselves. So why am I doing this, really? Why am I going, really? Why am I purchasing this, really? Why am I wearing this, really? Why did I say that, really?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Now it's been so helpful to me, and again, it was an idea of yours I stumbled on years ago. And I think the example, whether it was a talk or a book, it was purchasing a car. And I'm a bit of a car guy, like I'm detailed at that kind of thing. And you were like we use well the other one needed \$500 worth of work or the gas mileage wasn't very good. But you go out and buy a \$30,000 vehicle and justify a \$5 gas mileage difference. It probably isn't the most solid.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And I think you said, "Why don't you just say I really just wanted a new car?" And I've found that so liberating. Sometimes, "Well why did you get a new car?" "You know what, I just wanted a new car."

Andy Stanley:

Yeah. At least you're being honest with yourself.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well and it takes a lot of the weirdness out of conversations, doesn't it?

Andy Stanley:

Well yeah, because let's be honest, nobody falls for our strange reasoning, right? People smile and shake their head, but they know. And when we hear other people giving us their ridiculous reasons for the things they did, "Here's why we moved in. Here's why I'm moving out. Here's why I called him." We shake our head because we're polite, but we know that's not really why you're doing that. So if other people know, we ought to know. So, why? Why am I doing this, really?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. And then that goes into, "why are you launching another location?" You can get into really dangerous territory there quickly.

Andy Stanley:

Why am I preaching on this topic, really?

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's a tough question, Andy. When you really question your motives, it's been a gift to me over the years because it really makes me say, "Why am I posting this? Why did I write this? Why did I say this? Why am I sharing this on social?" Right? Do I really want to make other people envious.

Andy Stanley:

Oh gosh, yeah. Social media. Really that would reduce about half of what's on social media, right?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Do you want to walk us through the five questions? Just quick, give us the overview and then we'll double-click on them.

Andy Stanley:

Yeah. Well we've already talked about the first one. I call it the integrity question. That is, "am I going to be honest with myself?" The first question is, "why am I doing this, really?" So that's the integrity question. The other one is the legacy question. This is the one that I have gone over and over with my kids. And the legacy question is, "what story do I want to tell?" What story do I want to tell? This is so important. And we're old enough to be able to appreciate this, but our kids and people early on in leadership or early on in their career or early on in a marriage miss this, that every decision we make becomes a permanent part of the story of our lives.

Andy Stanley:

And our lives are not disconnected dots or disconnected events. Every single decision, every single event becomes a chapter in the story of our lives. And one day ... And I'll say this to all of your listeners, one day whatever you're going through right now, with your kids, your marriage, at work, with your money, your health. Whatever you're going through right now, one day is not going to be anything other than a story that you tell.

Andy Stanley:

So the question is, what story do you want to tell, when this is just a story that you tell? And what this does, this pulls me out of my immediate context to my ultimate context of my entire life. What story do I want to tell? What story do I want to tell my kids when my kids are old enough to tell this story, or my grandkids.

Andy Stanley:

In the book I tell the story about a dear, dear friend who went through a long, protracted, expensive, expensive divorce. And when his heart was first broken, when he discovered what was happening, we were having dinner. I've known him since he was in the ninth grade, and he's just been very successful in what he's done in Atlanta. And I said to him ... I'm trying not to say his name. I said, "Look, I know this is hard to imagine, but one day you're going to look back and this whole divorce and all the yuck and all the complexity and all the anger, it's just going to be a story that you tell. And one day it's going to be a story that your kids are going to want you to tell at a different level, when they're older."

Andy Stanley:

I said, "So please, please, please. Please make every single decision with this in mind, what story do I want to tell when this is nothing more than a story that I tell?" And about every two weeks he would text me and he would say, "Andy, I can still tell my whole story. Andy, I can still tell my whole story." And this was years ago. But he would tell you, that thought is what kept him from lashing out, from poisoning his kids about what his ex-wife was doing, about so many things that would've been justified but he thought, "It's justified, but is that the story I want to tell?"

Andy Stanley:

So if we can just remember that. What story do I want to tell when this is just a story that I tell? So that's the legacy question.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Why don't we just take them one by one, because that was so rich, Andy. When you first frame the question it's easy to see that as a prevention question, like we think about all of the headlines that could've been avoided, the stories, the broken hearts, the dissolved families, the pastors-

Andy Stanley:

The stories nobody thought would be told.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right. Because when you read about it in the headlines or a congregation gets heard or victims step forward, nobody intended to tell that story. I'm not sure that graduating from high school they're like, "This is how it ends." But I think the way you frame it, as a recovery story like, "Okay, so some really bad things have happened. So this did not work out." You got fired or the marriage is over or you did something inappropriate. But that question can speak into those low moments as well, right?

Andy Stanley:

Yeah, because this is just a chapter. This is not your story. This is just a chapter in the story of your life. And we get to have, in most cases, new chapters. So what story do you want to tell when this is nothing but a story that you tell? And there are more stories, there are more chapters to write. So again, realizing that what's happening now does not have to define you.

Andy Stanley:

But again, as soon as we begin to think about our lives ... We don't think this way naturally. As soon as we begin to think about our lives as a story, that there's a story arc and we're just in a chapter, suddenly what's immediate is differentiated from what's ultimate. And when we can make decisions based on ultimate rather than immediate, we make better decisions, we live with fewer regrets. And that's the power of the, what story do I want to tell.

Carey Nieuwhof:

If we can just ... There's some leaders right now who are opening up a brand new year when this airs. And they're like, "Yeah Andy, 2020 was hard enough, but 2021, you should see what's going on in my life." I think back to my burnout, which you know about. We met around the time, in 2006. It was just a hard time. And I just remember thinking "is not the story I want to write for my sons. This is not the story I want to write for my ministry." And of course when you're in the pain of burnout, as I was that year, it's a really hard thing to imagine you'll ever get out of. But here we are all these years later and things are really different. And you're right, it's a painful story, but it's a chapter in a story.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So for those leaders who are opening 2021, a brand new year going, "Gosh I wish it was a better story." Do you have anything you want to say, just from a pastoral or a friend perspective to them?

Andy Stanley:

Yeah. You know what it is, if you're in ministry it's the same advice you've given other people. It really is. It's that realizing that everything has a season. And if this is a bad season, that's what it is, it's a bad season. But it's not the entire story. So please ... And here's the thing, please don't make a permanent decision about a temporary problem. Please don't make a permanent decision trying to address what really is a temporary problem. And it doesn't seem temporary, because it is as big as your entire life right now.

Andy Stanley:

But here's what you know, because you're smart. If somebody came to you with your story, you would have the context and the breadth of both your experience and seeing enough about what's going on in their life to understand hey this is a bad season. This is a bad moment. Please don't make a big, permanent decision in light of the fact that you're going through a difficult season.

Andy Stanley:

So it really is about perspective. It's about surrounding ourselves with people who've been there, done that, and survived and got on the other side of it. That's so extremely helpful, because sometimes we just need to know there's light, we just need to know there's hope, we just need to know this isn't the end. It is a season. One day you're going to tell this as a story. What story do you want to tell? And decide according to that question.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, yeah. That's great. That is not your legacy. A tough season doesn't have to be your legacy. That's so good to remember. And, obviously if you have the opportunity to write a better story, why wouldn't you do that in a good season, right? Rather than veering off into some ditch, which we're all tempted to do from time to time.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Take us to the third question. What's the third question, Andy?

Andy Stanley:

Yeah, the third question is the conscience question. The third question is, "is there a tension that deserves my attention?" Is there a tension that deserves my attention? And here's why this is important. We've all been in the midst of making decisions where on the left side of the ledger everything lines up perfectly in terms of reasons why this is a good decision. And then as you get closer to making the decision based on maybe even wise council, the numbers line up. As you get closer there's just something on the inside that's just kind of, as my dad would call it, a check in your spirit or a red flag. And the problem with it is there's no reason. There's no logic. It's just a hesitation. That's all it is. It's an internal hesitation.

Andy Stanley:

When you look at everything on paper, it's like this is a no-brainer. Everybody's like, "Yes." But if there's something inside of you, any kind of hesitation, the point of this question is don't rush by that. Don't brush by that. Don't ignore it. And don't talk yourself out of it. Pause and let whatever is bothering you bother you. And if you pause in that tension long enough, eventually information will begin to fill in some of those blanks. So is there a tension that deserves my attention?

Andy Stanley:

In the book I talk about this very famous, familiar story of David as he creeps up behind King Saul to slit Saul's throat. And everything in the cave is cheering him on. When Saul's out of the way, he'll be king. God's already anointed David as the king. This is a no-brainer. In fact, God had told David, "I'm going to deliver my enemies into your hands." He even had a verse. And he had shared the verse, the promise, with the guys in the back of the cave because they quoted it to him. They were saying, "This is the day where the Lord promised he's going to deliver your enemies to his hands." And there's your enemy. And when you walk out of this cave, with King Saul's head hanging from your hands, all of his soldiers are going to immediately proclaim you king and there's going to be a transition of power with very little bloodshed. This is a God thing, right?

Andy Stanley:

And as David creeps up. Imagine this moment. As he creeps up behind King Saul, there's just something. And at the last moment he recognizes, "Wait a minute. I'm about to kill the King. This can't possibly be God's way forward for me, to kill the king, my father-in-law." And so he changes plans at the last minute. And the text, it's interesting. The text says that we was conscience-stricken. There was just some unease. It didn't make any sense in the moment. But he paid attention to that tension. And he eventually became king, but without having to kill the king. Besides, that would not be a story he wanted to tell his grandchildren. "Grand-daddy, how did you become king? Well tell us the story about King Saul sitting on the potty."

Andy Stanley:

Again, I say to leaders, I have to remind myself. It doesn't have to be rational. It doesn't have to be logical. If there's a tension, pay attention to that tension. So the third question is, is there a tension that deserves my attention?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Does the tension ... Because I've felt that numerous times. Does the tension automatically mean no? I mean clearly in kill the king it does. Can it ever just resolve? Or what do you do?

Andy Stanley:

I think the point is you just pause. You pause. And here's what my experience has been. When I've been willing to pause, which oftentimes frustrates people, especially in the leadership context. Because part of leadership is, "I don't want to hold other people up." So if they need answers, I need to give them answers. If they're ready to move forward, I don't want ... I want to facilitate progress, not get in the way of progress.

Andy Stanley:

But in those leadership contexts, or with family, especially with kids. When there was just that something. When I've been willing to create space, it's amazing how often, in fact almost every situation, new information surfaces. It's not that I knew something and forgot it. But in that space something surfaces that begins to create questions about some of the things that were so clear on the left-hand side of the ledger. So sometimes it's just a matter of time. And pay attention to that tension, even if it doesn't make any sense to you, and even if nobody else can appreciate it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

The impatient Enneagram eights thank you, Andy. I've had those times where definitely I've paid attention to the tension and it's been like, "Oh, wow. I'm so glad I didn't say yes, yesterday. That makes sense." You slept on it, talked to your wife, talked to your team, prayed about it. There are other times though where the tension isn't fully resolved. And it's not moral. It's not like black or white. I'm not going to kill somebody. I'm not going to take something that isn't mine.

Andy Stanley:

That's good to know.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But it's like, is this wise or is this not wise? Is it smart? Is it not smart? And there are times where ... I'm just being honest here. I'm trying to think of the exact circumstance. But maybe it was a partnership or whatever, direction for what I'm doing with leaders where it's like I've talked to the team, talked to my wife. I'm praying about it. Is this faithful or not? We can't find any reason not to do it. It feels right, but I'm not 100% sure. So in those moments I'm kind of like, "Okay God. I'm just going to have to trust that this is in obedience." Any thoughts about that, like when you have that tension and it's not fully resolved?

Andy Stanley:

Yeah, and the answer is a little bit in the way you asked the question. You didn't ignore it. Because one of the things I talk about in the book is we're 100% in on something, and then our mom calls or a good friend calls and asks us a question. And the information they give us is not helpful, but it creates a doubt in our mind. And I give a couple of illustrations in the book of stories from my life where somebody asked a question. And it was so irritating. I was made at them. But at the end of the day they got me to thinking. And sure enough, I made the decision that was different than the decision I was going to make, just because somebody came along and just put a little bit of doubt in my mind about a path I was going down.

Andy Stanley:

And again, it's easy to dismiss the source of the information, "Well they've never done this. They don't know. They don't understand." And that's true. They don't understand. They've never been where you and I are. But you know what, it's so foolish to ignore those questions.

Andy Stanley:

So yeah, I think as long as we're creating space. And again, it goes back to the first question, why am I doing this, really? Why am I doing this, really? Is there a tension that deserves my attention? So these questions all work in tandem. And that's why in the book I say if you'll just integrate these five questions into your decision-making repertoire of questions because one of the other things I talk about, we actually all have a list of questions we subconsciously ask ourselves every time we make a decision. Some of them are actually bad questions like, will anybody find out? Will I get caught? Those are the kinds of questions we ask ourselves.

Andy Stanley:

So these five questions work in tandem, again, I think to create the space sometimes we need for other information to surface, or to recognize something perhaps we've just missed.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Hmm. Okay. Well one of the things I'm noticing, now even hearing you talk about the book. Having read the book but also seeing your decision-making matrix. A lot of that is time and space to breathe and paying attention to differing views, and the wisdom of not just, "Yeah, this is the way to go," large and in charge leadership. Which when I think back to how you led at your dad's church, and then when you started North Point, with that team-based decision making, that was pretty counter cultural in the 90s. We're still trying to recover from large and in charge leadership today. But that was kind of revolutionary. You would've been an outlier back in the 90s for that style of leadership, I would think.

Andy Stanley:

I don't know. I just didn't have enough confidence to lead any other way, honestly. And you're right, those were the big, bold, God told me, I prayed about it, God showed me, I went to the mountain, I came down from the mountain, this is the way we're going. I grew up around a lot of that kind of language and I was never 100% comfortable with it. And it was amazing what God said that then things didn't work out, but nobody brought that back up.

Andy Stanley:

So I think, if anything, the pendulum in my life kind of swung way in a different direction. Because the Scripture, and common sense, says there is wisdom in a multitude of counselors. And listening. Listen. Listen. Listen. Listening is how we learn. And if we're not going to listen and learn, we're just eventually not going to make great decisions, no matter how smart we are and regardless of our leadership intuition.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So the next question, one that's been asked 1,000 times in our home, and on good days it's still asked. Do you want to take us into the, what do you call it, maturity question?

Andy Stanley:

Yeah, the maturity question. This is the question I grew up with, with my dad, from day one. "Andy, what is the wise thing to do? What do you think the wise thing is to do?" And the problem with the question is its so clarifying it's terrifying. It's much easier to ask what is the right thing or is this wrong, is this immoral, is this illegal. It's easy to ask those questions, because no it's not immoral. It might be immoral-ish, but it's not exactly immoral. It's not exactly illegal. It's not exactly unethical. Okay.

Andy Stanley:

But what is the wise thing to do? This is the maturity question. And I call it the maturity question because it takes a lot of maturity to hit pause and to step out of the context of right and wrong, good and bad, legal/illegal, and to ask, okay but is this the wise thing for me to do? And that's the catch. Is this the wise thing, not for everybody. But is this the wise thing for me to do? And here's something that all of your listeners can appreciate. And if you're a parent or a grandparent, my goodness this is why, as you just said Carey, it's central in our homes bringing up our children.

Andy Stanley:

Your greatest regret. If you think about it, your greatest financial regret, relational regret, whatever it might be. Our greatest regrets are almost always preceded by a series of unwise decisions. Not immoral. Not illegal. Our worst weekend, our worst moment, that marriage that you regret, that relationship you regret. Generally speaking, our greatest regrets are preceded by a series of unwise decisions. So asking the question, "is this the wise thing to do," keeps us away from the edge of disaster and from the brink of regret.

Andy Stanley:

And of course, as people who've heard me teach for a while know, there's three parts to this question. In light of my past experience, what is the wise thing for me to do? In light of my current circumstances, my current state of emotion, what is the wise thing for me to do? In light of my future hopes and dreams, what is the wise thing for me to do? And we have been in ministry long enough to see men and women undermine their own hopes and dreams by making a series of unwise decisions that led them to the brink of disaster. And when you live on the edge, it just takes one more small decision to undermine our future hopes and dreams.

Andy Stanley:

So it's the maturity question, what is the wise thing for me to do?

Carey Nieuwhof:

I think occasionally when you see people make disastrous decisions that get noticed or make the headlines or disqualify them from whatever, it's tempting to think from a distance, "Oh, they just had a really bad day and they made a really bad decision." But that's rarely the way it works, right?

Andy Stanley:

No. We only get the highlight reel, which is really the low-light reel.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Low-light reel, yeah.

Andy Stanley:

We just get the story, the juicy part of the story. But then when you've tracked with someone through the process or through their lives, or you get the backstory, it's always a series of really unwise decisions. So if we can set the standard at wisdom, rather than legal/illegal, moral/immoral, we're just going to make better decisions and live with fewer regrets.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's the 1,000 little compromises that leave you compromised, right? So I guess the encouragement to a leader who is listening going, "Yeah, you know what, I'm not over the edge but there's probably some things I don't want anyone to know about," would be what? What would you say to that leader in this moment?

Andy Stanley:

Well that's why it's such a terrifying question. It's clarifying. We almost always know immediately if it's the wise thing to do. And we say that. We say, "Well, I don't know if it's the wise thing to do." Well then don't do it. You're never going to go wrong making the wise decision. And the proof of that is this. Again, if you have children, regardless of their age, don't you want them to make the wise decision? If you have married children, don't you want your daughters and son-in-laws to be making the wise decision as it relates to their relationship with your son or your daughter? And everybody's like, "100%. Yeah." Well come on. You've got the wisdom to know how important this is. But that's why it's called the maturity question. It's not intuitive. A lot of people never get there. Because you step back from a lot of good opportunities, you step away from a lot of things that aren't exactly illegal.

Andy Stanley:

Years ago ... I've shared this. I don't know if we've talked about it, but Ron Blue, some of your listeners know who Ron Blue is. He gave me great advice. He said, "Andy," talking about finances. He said, "Never do anything, never make a financial decision, don't do anything financially that you wouldn't want to have to stand up in front of your entire church and explain." Not because it's illegal or immoral. But if you would not want to have to explain it, don't do it. And I tell you what, Carey, that piece of advice ... Many, many years ago. Sandra and I had just been married. We've been married for 30 years. That piece of advice has kept us out of so many good financial deals, financial opportunities. They weren't illegal. They weren't immoral. But I thought, if people found out about this would I want to have to explain it? No. Just don't do it. Again, that's the power of, what is the wise thing to do?

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's so good. That's a really good litmus test. I don't think I'd heard that one. Thanks for sharing that, Andy. Okay, you've got one more question. You've got what you call the relationship question.

Andy Stanley:

The relationship question.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Thank you.

Andy Stanley:

Yeah. No, this question is different than the other four, because there is a payoff with the other four. If you do the wise thing, if you say, "Why am I doing this, really? What story do I want to tell? Is there tension that deserves my attention?" If you ask those four questions, you will be better off. This question will cost you. But if you're a Jesus follower, this question is the question that sets us up to make a difference in the world. And the relationship question is this, ""what does love require of me? What does love ... and here's the catch, what does love require of me?"

Andy Stanley:

When I teach this to students or even to our adult congregation I say, "Hey, when it comes to relationships, when you're not sure what to say or do, you do what love requires of you." And again, it's like the wisdom question, it is so clarifying. I know what I want to do. I know what she deserves me to do. I know what everybody else does. Okay. What does love require of me? And again, as Jesus followers, when we talk about love we're not talking about just general love. It's the love that Jesus

demonstrated when he said, "Hey, I want you to love others the way that I have loved you." It is sacrificial. That's why the question is, what does love require of me?

Andy Stanley:

And real love always requires something. But you know this. When two people in any kind of relationship, whether it's a business partnership, staff relationship, marriage relationship, brother/sister relationship, when two people ask the question ... "Okay we have our differences. I've been hurt. I hurt her. She hurt me. Whatever it might be. What does love require of me?" "There is nothing you can't overcome relationally when both parties are asking that question. But of course the catch is, there's no guarantee the other party's going to ask the question. But welcome to Christianity. Welcome to the gospel. What does love require of me?"

Carey Nieuwhof:

Andy, this has been so rich. Anything else on decision making that you think leaders should be paying attention to?

Andy Stanley:

Well it's the steering wheel for your personal life. It is the steering wheel for your organizational life. You're already asking some questions internally when you make a decision. Add these five. And for those of you that think, "Oh good, I don't need to buy the book because now I have the questions." Remember this, knowing and doing have nothing to do with each other. So I hope you'll get the book. I hope you'll read chapters of this book to your kids. If you do what Sandra and I did for years, we would pay our kids to read certain chapters of certain books because we wanted to get that content into their hearts. We were not above bribing our kids.

Andy Stanley:

And so these five simple questions, you will make better decisions, you will live with fewer regrets.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, if I can, two quick questions before we go. In good interviews I always lose track of my notes, so thanks for rescuing me earlier when I lost track of the questions and all that. But there are two here on the page.

Andy Stanley:

I didn't even notice.

Carey Nieuwhof:

There are two here on the page that are really good. Overthinking. So these are really good questions. And some of them are new to me, some of them I've known for years because I know you and follow you. But you can get into an overthinking part where you're just like, "Well I don't really know. What is the wise thing to do? What story do I want to write?" And you just turtle and you don't make any decision. Overthinking is a real problem today. How do you know when to pull the trigger? Is there a rough test?

Andy Stanley:

Yeah. Well first of all, knowing yourself. You know your temptation is to now I know, I'm going to go. Now that I know, I'm going to go. My inclination is I don't have enough information. I don't have enough information. Because as an Enneagram one, I want to make the perfect decision, I want to make everything better. So I've learned for me, I only get about 80%. I'm not making this up, because I've shared this publicly. When I asked Sandra to marry me I was only 80%. In fact, I might've been less than 80% and she saw it on my face. And when I asked her to marry me I was so white and so nervous. She said, this was her response, "Andy, you don't have to do this." That's how I came across in my proposal. That's just embarrassing, right?

Andy Stanley:

But I know that about myself. So 80%, I just have to go, because I'll never be 100%. You're 100% before you've got half the information. You know you have to slow down a little bit. So I think all of us have to figure out our temperament. We have to figure out our personalities, our season in life. And knowing that and then surrounding ourselves with the right people and compensating for that ... And again, as a leader I don't want to slow other people down. In fact, at the end of all of my meetings here's how I end my staff meetings, whether it's three or four or a larger group, "what do you need from me? What do you need from me to take the next step?" So I don't want us to leave here and you're like, "Ah, if only Andy would," or, "If you'd only given me," or, "I'd ask him to write this thing." So what do you need from me so that you can move forward with what you're doing?

Andy Stanley:

So I don't want to slow people down. But at the same time, because I'm responsible for a lot of things, just like your listeners are responsible for a lot of things, whether it's family or the organization, we have to make decisions and we have to learn our own pace. And then we have to compensate for whether we need to speed up or perhaps slow down.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Crisis leadership is a different bird as well. So a lot of us have been propelled in the last year into a level of complex decision making nobody ever thought that they would be in, or nobody signed up for, et cetera.

Andy Stanley:

That's for sure. Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Anything, and we talked about that, we'll link back to the other interview I did with you and David Kinnaman recently about decision making, which I thought was so good. But anything you'd say as we head into another year that appears to be unstable or who knows what's happening by the time this airs, but the balance or the reasonable predictability we used to enjoy as leaders appears to be on indefinite suspension. So any thoughts on decision making in the midst of that?

Andy Stanley:

Well it goes back to what we talked about at length in that other conversation. We can't bring certainty where there is no certainty. And to pretend to is to do people a disservice. But the next best thing to certainty is clarity. So where decision making becomes really, really, really important in the midst of

uncertainty or an uncertain season is that to make any kind of decision that gives people clarity around two things, here's what we're going to do, here's how you fit in. Here's what we're going to do. We don't know what's going to happen, but here's what we're going to do. I want to be super clear. And here's what I need you to do. Clarity around what we're doing, where you fit in.

Andy Stanley:

For most people, for a short period of time, that's enough. And in times of uncertainty, saying, "Hey, here's our three year plan." Well of course that's a complete waste of time. When COVID hit we all hit pause on just about everything that had anything to do with a 3-5 year plan, right? And we went into short decision making mode. The organizations and the non-profits and the churches that have had the most difficult time are those that refused to make even short-term clarifying decisions about here's what we're ... We know what we can't do. Here's what we're going to do. Here's where you fit in. Here's what we're going to do. Here's where you fit in. And these may be three weeks. These may be three months. But clarity in the midst of uncertainty. But again, that's decision making and that is leadership in times of uncertainty.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow. Well the book is called Better Decisions, Fewer Regrets. For those of you who are watching, you can see I got a little picture. And it's not a particularly long book. You can actually move through this in a morning or an afternoon if you want to. And I think it's one you'll pick up from time to time. People can find it anywhere books are sold. Where can they find all things Andy these days, Andy?

Andy Stanley:

Like everything, everybody, Amazon's your best bet. Wherever online books are sold is the best place to get it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Andy, you've helped a lot of leaders today. Thanks so much for letting me pick your brain. I really appreciate it.

Andy Stanley:

It's great to see you, Carey. I hope we do this again before too long.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Man, every time I'm with Andy I learn something new, and this time was no exception. Hey, if you are new to the show, please note we've got show notes for you, including transcripts. I love to read stuff. Those are free. And you can find the transcripts for this episode, along with links to everything Andy and I talked about in [careynieuwhof.com/episode389](http://careynieuwhof.com/episode389). And those are there for all of our shows every week. We also do a version on YouTube. So for those of you who prefer to watch, or maybe you want to play this back for your team, you can head on over to my YouTube channel. And again, all the links for that are in the show notes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Also wanted to say it was a lot of fun over the last week or so giving away free Starbucks. So we like to surprise our podcast listeners. You guys are the absolute best. And we love to come around leaders too.

So that's what we do. Coming up in a few minutes I've got the What I'm Thinking About Segment. And I'm going to talk about a couple of insights that we didn't cover in this conversation that I learned early on as a leader for how to make decision making. They've been two filters that I'm still using to this day. And oh my goodness, when I was a rookie leader they saved my bacon. So that's coming up in a few moments.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I want to tee up what's up next on the podcast. My wife and I sit down with a long-time friend, Jon Acuff. And Jon interviews us about our marriage. We are really passionate about not only helping you lead better at work, but we're passionate about helping you lead better at home. My wife, Toni, and I have been married for 30 years. We have had some tough seasons and some good seasons. We met in law school, so she actually has practiced for a number of years as a divorce attorney. And she took all of her insights and put them in a book, which releases next week, called Before You Split. It's what couples don't know before they break up, because the grass is always greener. And it tells some of our story too. So Toni and I asked Jon to interview us, so here is an excerpt from our conversation with New York Times bestselling author, Jon Acuff.

Jon Acuff:

You take off your ring, you throw it on the floor. Sit us back in that moment. This is the middle moment, if you will, the middle of two different marriages you've had.

Toni Nieuwhof:

Yeah. What can I say? It was, I would say an epitome of the kind of chaotic emotional roller coaster we were on, the way our differences would sometimes just blow up in the moment. So it was a very accurate reflection of where we were actually at when our marriage was rough.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That is coming up next time on the podcast. And yeah, it's just at thrill to bring a little more of our backstory to the world. And I hope it encourages you. I know it's been a really, really tough season on a lot of couples, a lot of marriages. And yeah, we'd love to help with that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Also coming up we've got, as I said at the beginning, Patrick Lencioni, Rob Pelinka from the L.A. Lakers, Seth Godin, Craig Groeschel, Mark Clark, John Cotter, Michael Arrieta, and so many more. So, very excited for this year, and thanks for being part of it. It is time for What I'm Thinking About. I'm going to talk about two questions I ask when I'm making decision. And it's brought to you by Pro Media Fire. You can book your free digital strategy session today at [promediafire.com/churchgrowth](http://promediafire.com/churchgrowth). And by BELAY, text Carey, C-A-R-E-Y, to 31996 to get your free download of BELAY's delegation planner, and start reclaiming your free time.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So I was a young leader, I was in my early 30s and we were trying to do some bold moves. In fact, what we were doing were transitioning three dying churches that had started to grow into what would eventually become Connexus Church and a thriving ministry of thousands of people in multiple

locations. But we started with six people in a church that felt like nothing had changed since the 19th century. So we started to change music, governance, kids ministry programs, et cetera.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And I had just stepped out of the world of law. So you know, in law you just do what you want to do. But when you're trying to lead volunteers, it's a lot more complicated. So I had to very quickly develop, along with our board, because we had no staff, it was just me solo with our board, some questions for filtering all the opposition that we were getting. And hey, guess what, one consistent piece over the last 25 years of leadership is we get opposition, just like I talked about with Andy in this conversation.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So there are two questions I learned early on. I do not know how I got these. I think they were a gift. They just came to me one day. But they've been useful. And it's two simple questions, that when you're dealing with people who disagree with a direction. This could be staff members, board members, people from the organization. It could be a client, a customer, whatever your context is. It's simply this.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Question number one is, "is there a Biblical argument in what they're saying?" So for me, as a Christian, but also as a church leader it's really important for me to hear this, because I do not have a monopoly on wisdom. I am not the sole interpreter of scripture. Now what I've found over the years, particularly in the church, but also I think this is a general leadership principle, is that often there's not a Biblical argument in what they're saying. In a previous episode that I had with Andy Stanley, Andy talked about his decision to close the church for a number of months to in-person worship and just do online only. And he got a lot of opposition. When he called the people who were posing it, it wasn't about the Bible, it was about politics.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And he said 100% of the people he talked to were like, "You bought the lie," or, "This thing isn't real," or, "You've just caved to political pressure," and that kind of thing. Now occasionally you will hear a Biblical argument in what they're saying. But it's amazing how often, even in the church, the conflict isn't around Biblical principles, it's around cultural preferences or personal preferences. And then that moves it to another category. If I'm doing something theologically wrong, I need to be accountable for that. But often it's about preferences or ideologies or that kind of thing, rather than Biblical principles. So anyway, pay attention to that. I think that's just an important integrity check.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But then here's the question that I've found super, super helpful. So this is true whether there's a Biblical argument in what they're saying or whether there isn't. But this question is powerful, to me anyway. Simply this, "these the kind of people we can build the future of the church on? Or, is this the kind of person we can build the future of the organization on?" And when you ask that question you almost get an intuitive like, "Yeah. No. No." And what that means is if this is one of your best people, if this is somebody who's totally invested in your mission, your best customer, your best client, they've been with you for a long time and they're saying it's a bad idea, it's like woo, sit up, pay attention. This is the kind of person that we can build the future of the church on.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Often what happens is you start to ask that question and you realize, well this is the kind of person that's just opposed to everything. Or maybe they're not opposed to everything, but you look at their life and you're like, "I don't know what you're accomplishing. You seem to be against this or you're against that. Or you're struggling here or you're struggling there." And I know it's sort of judgmental, so you can get mad at me for asking bad questions. But a few filters to run that through. It's been so helpful to me. Is this the kind of person we can build the future of the organization on?

Carey Nieuwhof:

So a couple of questions that will help you with that. Is their vision primarily based on the past or the future? Yeah. Well a lot of the time opponents vision is based on the past, not the future. Do they have a spirit of humility? Are they coming to you with a real sense of, "Hey, I don't know, but," because if humility is lacking it's just really hard to build the future of the church on people without humility.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What about this, who's following them? This is a big question. And is this the kind of group you would want around your senior leadership table? So who are the kind of people that they attract? Are they focused on themselves or the mission that you're trying to accomplish? And then, do they offer positive alternatives that will help you build into the future? Those are just some questions under the question of, are these the kind of people we can build the future of the organization on?

Carey Nieuwhof:

And often in opposition circles the answer instinctively to both questions is no. It's not the kind of person that has a Biblical argument, and we probably can't build the future of our church or organization around them. So therefore, "Thank you very much. Really appreciate the feedback. And we're going to move on. But thank you for sharing that." Now it's a lot more complex than that, but I've found those to be really helpful. If you want more, I actually write about that in my book called *Leading Change Without Losing it*. You can get that anywhere books are sold, on Amazon, et cetera. But those are questions that have served me well for 25 years.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Hey, if you haven't yet checked out the Church Leader Toolkit, that's absolutely free for you. And it's something that we want to equip you with for 2021, as you head into a brand new year. Got some tips on digital preaching and online engagement, and a bunch of other things. So you can find that by texting Toolkit to 33777, or simply go to [churchleadertoolkit.com](http://churchleadertoolkit.com).

Carey Nieuwhof:

Hey, thank you so much, leaders. We're so grateful for you. Back next time with Jon Acuff and my wife, and a whole lot more. And I hope your 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.