

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 393 of the podcast. My name is Carey Nieuwhof. And I hope our time together today helps you lead like never before. Well, I got to be honest, this was a fun one. I am so excited to bring you my conversation with Rob Pelinka. Rob is the LA Lakers GM and vice president of basketball operations. We talk about all kinds of things. And this episode is brought to you by Pro Media Fire, you can book your free digital strategy session today at promediafire.com/church-growth and by ServeHQ. You can go to servehq.church to start your free 14 day trial for their online subscription tools for churches and not for profits. Use the code Carey C-A-R-E-Y and get 10% off for life.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, this was such a fun episode and such a privilege to do it. After he won the world championship with the LA Lakers back in late 2020, we got an email from Rob saying, "Hey, I've been a listener to the show if you ever want to chat." And yeah, I missed that email. We get like thousands a week. And I don't know it just didn't come up. And so I had a mutual friend text us and says, "Hey, the GM of the LA Lakers would like to connect with you, you open to that?" I'm like, "You mean the LA basketball?" Yeah. I connected with Rob turns out he's been listening for a few years. Thank you, Rob. That was just so humbling. And what an incredible leader. And I had to be upfront with Rob, and this is why I had so many friends who wanted to be me. I am not a sports guy. So of course I know who the Lakers are and Kobe Bryant and LeBron James. Yeah, I know that. But some of you would be like, "Oh, I got so many questions."

Carey Nieuwhof:

I want to tackle this from a leadership perspective and from a number of different things, did a lot of when we're getting ready for this and Rob and I just had a great time. So I'm so excited to bring you that conversation. Rob is a graduate from the Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan. He graduated with high honors and then he is also a graduate, a cum laude from the University of Michigan Law School where he graduated in 1996. He played basketball as well with the University of Michigan. We talked about that. And then he went on to become a sports' agent. We talked a bit about his career. He was named by Forbes as one of the top 10 sports' agents in the world and represented among others, Kobe Bryant, had a lifelong friendship with that. We talked about that and swimming with sharks, that is a fascinating story.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And then more recently joined the LA Lakers as Vice President of basketball operations and general manager. So in his time with the Lakers, Rob has been widely praised for transforming the team DNA, constructing a roster and staff that are in the franchise, their 17th NBA championship in 2020. He helped make one of the most significant free agent signings in team history in 2018 when the Lakers added four time NBA MVP LeBron James, following that with a franchise altering trade that brought seven time All Star Anthony Davis to LA.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And he's also introduced something called Lakers Genius Talks, a series of life skill discussions, we talked about that for Lakers players, led by luminaries such as Denzel Washington, Dave Chappelle, Kendrick Lamar, Allyson Felix, Dwayne Johnson and Elon Musk. Yeah, that's how Rob got himself into a Tesla, fascinating backstory. And so he coordinates all of the day to day functions of basketball operations, making personnel decisions, contract negotiations, salary caps, scouting, the whole deal, and we get into the whole leadership side of that and also his faith as well.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's been a fascinating conversation, such a privilege. Days like this make me say, "how do I get to do this?" This is unreal, and I'm so excited to bring it to you. Hey, you are getting ready for 2021, right? So how do you win the digital game? Well, there's a couple of options. Everyone's online now you got to be, right? You can hire an internal staff member, it's expensive and they're only an expert in one or two main areas or you could hire Pro Media Fire, you get an entire team of experts for less than the cost of a professional staff hire. You also save a bit on employee taxes and health insurance and staff turnover becomes a thing of the past, because you've got an agency representing you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

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Carey Nieuwhof:

And in the new year for listeners of this podcast, you get a special offer. You can go to servehq.church, start your free 14 day trial and then use the code Carey, C-A-R-E-Y to get 10% off for life. Without further ado, I'm so excited to bring you my conversation with Rob Pelinka. He is the LA Lakers GM and Vice President of basketball operations. Here we go. Rob, it's such a thrill to have you on the podcast. Welcome.

Rob Pelinka:

Thanks, Carey. I've so enjoyed your lessons on leadership, I commute in California up to 405, so your podcast is such an inspiration. And it's interesting because I feel like sometimes I learned as much from the guests as I do your questions, you give such amazing questions. And, of course, things are all over the map from executive at Chick-fil-A or Anne Graham Lotz telling stories about the dinner time table, or a bakery in the Rust Belt. But just picking up little nuggets that you can incorporate into your own leadership is such a gift and so much of that is provided through your lens. So we all appreciate you so much.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Rob, I'll tell you it was a thrill to find out that you were a listener. That was a pretty exciting day for me. And as I shared with you, I have a lot of friends who wish they were me today. And as I confess to you, I know who the Lakers are, I know who Kobe Bryant is, I know LeBron James, but I'm not a sports guy. So there's a lot of people, I've got my doors locked, just in case I get taken over for this interview. But it's a thrill. I don't know whether you find this or not but I find that great leadership for me is really eclectic and it comes from very unlikely sources. Is that similar to your journey? We want to focus on your story, but do you love learning from left field right field, just even non sports stuff? It's like, wow. Like you mentioned, Mark who has that bakery in Oakmont, Pennsylvania, right?

Rob Pelinka:

Yeah, exactly.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That was a couple years ago on the show, but I just learned so much from him. And having been to that bakery, you have to go some time, Rob, you really do know.

Rob Pelinka:

The lens of leadership is such a broad mosaic. And you mentioned Kobe, of course, just such a dear friend, but he grew up in Italy as the listeners probably know, we had a lot of years over there. He just developed this curiosity almost as like a renaissance man to dig into things really deeply. He would go and study Michelangelo and how he did a statue or study a Da Vinci painting and incorporate that into his basketball game. Having been best friends with him for 20 years, you get this curiosity about life that draws you into all sorts of different places to develop your leadership lens and your program has done that for me. I think of the places my friendship with him brought me. I remember there was one time, Carey, where he was trying to formulate a new aspect of his game and the way he moved on the court, and he was drawing inspiration from how great white sharks attacked.

Rob Pelinka:

I get a call from Kobe and he says, "Hey, I want to take a boat out to the Farallon Islands," which is 20... it's a long boat ride off of the coast of Mexico. And before you know it, we're out there in a cage watching these massive creatures just swim around us and he's studying how that may affect how he moves around on the court and how he attacks the basket. Yeah, passion and leadership and learning can come from so many things in life.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow, that's fascinating. You went out with him into the ocean to watch these sharks move?

Rob Pelinka:

Oh, yeah, absolutely. I'll never forget that. It was a trip of a lifetime. He's extraordinarily patient and he's also a genius. He's got all this stuff that he studied about them and we're down there for an hour and I remember looking out, the water's cold and you're in a cage and in minutes are slow when you're looking out into the unknown. And there was one point in time after an hour of course, with my patience level, I was ready to go up and say, "Hey, great trip, great adventure. We didn't see anything." But all of a sudden, the ether opens like a curtain and this 15 foot great white shark just comes out of nowhere, right up to the cage. It was a holy moment when you see something like that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

No kidding. Yeah. I would think a little bit scary as well, when you realize you're that close to one of the forces of nature. I got to ask on behalf of all the basketball fans, what did he learn? Did he change his move? What was his observation that day?

Rob Pelinka:

He did. For him, it was a thing of pace. If you watch athletes move, sometimes they move steadily and sometimes they explode and move quickly. And if you look at how a great white shark attacks a seal, they methodically circle it and come up and then they pounce, so it was all about movement. But I remember with him to reading Walter Isaacson's book on Da Vinci. And just how if Da Vinci was going to paint a hummingbird, he wouldn't just look at it and paint it, he would dissect it and build it from the inside out. And I think when you look at things through that lens and that level of detail, you learn so much more. And I think that's what the geniuses in life inspire us with. I was telling you before we jumped on we have a thing at the Lakers called the Lakers Genius Talks, where I try to bring in outside leaders and speakers to talk to our team to LeBron James and Anthony Davis. Because the best way to learn isn't always just "hey, the basketball coach is teaching you basketball." It's how do we dimensionalize our lives.

Rob Pelinka:

One of our speakers was Elon Musk, who's a fascinating inventor and SpaceX and Tesla. I remember one of our players said to him as a leader, "how do you stay ahead of the competition?" And his answer was so fascinating. In typical genius style he thought for a second, he had his hand on his chin, he was pensive. And then he said, "If you're making rockets that do things that NASA can't do and you're making electric cars that can drive themselves while the others are still filling their cars up at the gas station, you don't really have to worry about the competition, you just have to be great at what you do." And the room just went silent.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow. Wow. Yeah, you think about him, because he's a subject of fascination for me too. I've read this multiple places, but you can't always trust the internet. He's building a whole under... Well, I guess he's now moving to Texas if you can believe that. But he's building a whole underground system of roads in California to solve the traffic problem. Do you know anything about that?

Rob Pelinka:

There's been talk of that. Because of the pandemic traffic in California has been lighter, but when it's heavy, an underground tunnel would be great. Some of the leaders we brought in, I remember Denzel Washington, of course, he's an Academy Award winning, amazing actor, one of the greatest and he sits court side to a lot of Lakers games. He came and he filmed Training Day where he was this hardcore character with like a killer edge and use foul language and was a nasty edgy character. And we've talked about, how do you set your mindset to compete as an athlete? What's the right frame of mind to get in? So we asked him a question. We said, "when you were trying to get into that character for training day, how did you in the morning get in that edgy, nasty mindset so you became authentic and real?" And his answer was stunning, Carey.

Rob Pelinka:

He looked at the room, and he said, "Well, the way that I got into character for that particular character..." I think he won an Oscar for that one. He said, "What I would do is I would... in my hotel room on set, but before I went to bed at night I would take my shoes and I would put them deep underneath my bed so that the next morning, I know that I need to get up and start my day on my knees in humility and prayer."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow.

Rob Pelinka:

I was like, "Wow." You would think he would be boxing or doing something hardcore, but he emptied himself and started his day in humility to take on that role, which is fascinating.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, I love your curiosity and your lifelong learning. I want to go back a couple of decades to 1996. You played some very, very serious basketball with Michigan, but you're also fairly serious about schooling. And from what I know, often it's, well, you have to do athletic so you're going to do school but you graduated cum laude with a JD, Juris Doctor, so you're a lawyer. I'm curious as to why you decided to take law so seriously because you are hyper competitive athletes and Michigan did really, really well when you were at Michigan. I'd love to know what made you pursue law as seriously as you did. Because you did clerkship and the whole deal.

Rob Pelinka:

It's a great question, Carey. I think sometimes when, God's faithfulness seems to be most clear when you look through the rear-view mirror of life, and you can see how he pieces your story together. Early on in life, I was raised in Illinois, just in a small town. And early on both my dad who was a coach and teacher and my mom who was a nurse, we had humble origins, he was a public school teacher. But early on, they really drove home in me if you pursue excellence with three things, with sports, pursue excellence in that, with your education and then with your faith, those are great pillars to start your journey. I took that to heart and didn't have a particular passion about the law until I was recruited to play basketball. And was extraordinarily blessed to be on a national championship team at the University of Michigan.

Rob Pelinka:

But when I started my journey at a college, at university, I was matched with a mentor who was a law school professor who was a student advisor. And his name was Professor Douglas Khan and he was an extraordinary or is an extraordinary human in that he really centered his life around serving others and just giving. He was a master chess player and won ping pong titles, just an extraordinary human being. But he centered his life on his students and on me. He and his wife would have me over for dinners and talk about the law and talk about the constitution and just really burst this curiosity about law school. When I was done, I graduated from the business school and then when I was finished getting that degree, which I knew was something I wanted to do, I was faced with, "Hey, do I go on and try to play professional ball, either in the States or overseas." But I felt like I really wanted to honor Professor Khan and be one of his students.

Rob Pelinka:

And the University of Michigan Law School is one of the top in the world. And when I applied and got in, I wanted to give back and it set me down this path of eventually getting into being a sports' agent and now a general manager of the Lakers.

Carey Nieuwhof:

We touched on it a little bit, but you represent a number of NBA players particularly Kobe Bryant, you're very well known for being his longtime agent, his friend, worked with him until his sad tragic, untimely death a while back. We touched on this already, but I'm sure this could be a whole episode in and of itself. What were some of the qualities habits and disciplines that made Kobe the man and the player that he was.

Rob Pelinka:

Listen Carey, since the tragedy of January 26th, there isn't really a moment of the day where I don't think about Kobe's influence and Gigi, Gianna's influence, his daughter, who was also our goddaughter. They inspire me every day and they are some of the greatest gifts of my life's journey. And I think it's interesting when Kobe... Kobe played 20 years for the Lakers and of course, won five World Championships and multiple MVPs and gold medals. And I remember, to me he was truly a best friend. And I remember when he finished... when he was retired, I had a great opportunity to have a dinner with them or just sitting on couches, maybe having a glass of wine or something. And I asked him, I said, I was like, "Hey, looking back on those 20 years and one of the great sports careers in the history of the world, is there anything maybe you would have done a little bit different or better?" Just late night conversations.

Rob Pelinka:

And I was really moved by his answer because he said, "Not a whole lot, but maybe one thing is empathy." Again, he's known as the Black Mamba that again, killer mentalities. You wouldn't expect that to be his answer. And then he unpacked it a little bit, he said, "When you start... I started as an 18 year old," he said, "You have my way or the highway lens on leadership, because you think you know what all and you come in and you expect everybody to think like you, to play like you, and to analyze the world like you," and there's lessons of leadership here. But he said, "As I matured and got in the second half of my career towards the end, I realized how important it was as a leader to have the quality of empathy." And he said, "What I mean by that is, how do I get the most out of my teammates? They're not all like me, I have to understand."

Rob Pelinka:

There was one player named Pau Gasol who was one of Kobe's great friends and an all star player. And he had a European upbringing in Spain and he had a different side of life circumstances. And Kobe had to tap into him to make him great. And so he had to start thinking more like him, he had to understand his past. I think that's so important on any team that we're involved in, is understanding other people's lens, their story and having empathy. And when Kobe did that he won three championships with Shaq, but then he also won on his own. And he said, "The key to winning that second set was that quality," understanding his teammates and how to make them great.

Carey Nieuwhof:

One of the things because you were an agent for a number of years and I don't think that your job is still in negotiation. We're going to talk about trades you made in the off-season after winning the World

Championship, et cetera, et cetera. But leadership is a lot of negotiation. I'm a law school grad as well. My favorite course was lawyers negotiator, that and constitutional law. But that negotiation course, I still think about all the time. What are some of the best strategies that you have discovered for negotiation?

Rob Pelinka:

Gosh, Carey, that's a good question too. As an agent I was able to negotiate, for 20 years, and now as a general manager. Early on, I think that there was a way of doing business that was, "Hey, you had to win the deal." That didn't necessarily work. I think if you go into a negotiation with a scorched earth mentality of, "I need to get everything and the other person needs to get on their knees," I really think that's going to not lead to maybe the best result. We tried it, I've tried to do things as an agent and as a general manager, more through a partnership lens and a lens of collaboration. Oftentimes, when I'm negotiating a deal with another General Manager in the NBA, or with a player agent, you're going to have to come back and be at the table over and over with them on other deals. I think both parties want to walk away and say, "Hey, this was an effective partnership lens and it benefited both of us." I think, again, if you can approach it that way, you'll probably get a way better result.

Rob Pelinka:

And then I think the other thing I've learned is, maybe some of the negotiating books would say, "Oh, hold your Ace card, don't show the other side what you're thinking." I would say probably more of a transparency lens leads to more productive deals and partnerships, if you really approach it that way. Oftentimes, you'll hear leaders say, "Well, I just need to do what's best for the organization." And I get that to some extent, but how about, "I need to do what's best for all the parties involved here." Maybe that's a broader lens.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, that strikes me as intuitively correct and generous. You have a very nice demeanor about you Rob. You don't come across as, "I'm going to get this. Here we go." Can you explore that a little bit more, because I think that's missing. One of the things that's really bothering me is how tribalized and divided our culture has been. And I think that idea of empathy you were talking about with Kobe Bryant. Can you flesh that out? Without telling tales out of school, is there a scenario you can think of where that ended up working out really well? To the level you're comfortable sharing details. I just love to know, put some bones on that.

Rob Pelinka:

Yeah, absolutely. If you think about it, not just for me, but if you're a general manager of a sports franchise and you are trying to win a championship, the absolute key ingredient to that in any sport, whether it's hockey or baseball or basketball is getting great players. You can have the greatest General Manager and the greatest coach... To keep myself in a frame of humility I tell myself every morning, a team can have a great general manager and a great coach but if their players aren't good, they're going to be zero wins 80 losses. Not enough good players. Just to put meat on the bones of your question, let's say I'm negotiating with a player agent and it's maybe just on a basketball team, there's five starters. And maybe this negotiation happens to be for the 12th man on the team. Maybe someone that's not going to play a pivotal role. But the negotiation goes really, really well with the agent, he felt like he was dealt with honorably and fairly and kindly.

Rob Pelinka:

Well, then fast forward, what if a year later that agent represents a player that's a superstar and is a free agent and says, "Gosh, that went really well. I think this is an organization I can trust, they're transparent. They treat me with integrity and openness and kindness." Maybe that relationship capital and that glue puts you to the front in signing that player who can become a franchise changing player. It's building up that social capital and that relationship capital, I think that ultimately helps in the end.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, that's a good point, right? Because you're negotiating for the 12th person, but that agent represents numerous people. You really have to think about treating people fairly. What about dealing with the Kobe's or the LeBron James's and you weren't LeBron's agent, but you obviously brought them on to the Lakers, et cetera. When you're dealing with talent that large, are there any different principles, strategies, or approaches that are more helpful or less helpful?

Rob Pelinka:

You know what's interesting Carey, for 20 years I was on the player agent side. And so you're an advocate for players. And in those 20 years, I was able to learn so much about how players think and what they need. I think what we've been able to do now is to take all those experiences, where now I'm on the team side. We've tried to create a culture at the Lakers that says, We want to be there to serve all the needs of the players and make sure they're getting actually everything they need. And because of those experiences I had before, we're able to identify those things. And the Lakers if you go back, three or four years, we were really in a period of losing a ton and couldn't turn it around. I've been working there for three years. And when we got hired, it was how do we create this culture of service? Getting everything that the players need? Like I said earlier, you've had other leaders on podcasts like Chick-Fil-A comes out, it's all about the customers. How do we make customers feel good?

Rob Pelinka:

I think it's that same thread at the Lakers. How do we create a culture where the players feel like this is the team I want to play for. Their leadership, they're their servant oriented, I think that's really important.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Let's go there. Let's talk about that. Because if my research is correct, was it a franchise worst six year playoff drought for the Lakers when they hired you?

Rob Pelinka:

Yeah. We were in a drought. I remember when I got the job. Again, I had dinner with Kobe and he was like, "I know how detail oriented, process oriented you are." And he said, "I'll give you two or three years and you'll have the Lakers back to a championship club." I had no idea at the time, I was like, "You got to be kidding me." But it was such a blessing. I think, we played in a bubble Carey. We won the 2020 World Championship. And because of the pandemic, we were forced to do it in a bubble in Orlando, Florida, where it was 100 days of testing and all sorts of crazy things that the world will never know. Difficult to be away from family and in a hotel for 100 nights. But again, I think in that environment, where it's mentally taxing, it's emotionally taxing, I felt like the team that was going to come out in the end with

the world championship trophy was probably the team and the players that were getting the best service from the organization.

Rob Pelinka:

Because life goes on when you're in a medical bubble family members get married, people pass away, all sorts of stuff is going on and players are experiencing these things and how are you coming around them to support them?

Carey Nieuwhof:

What would you do? What would you do to support players? What are some practical examples of how you create that culture?

Rob Pelinka:

I think it's availability. It's time I remember one of the players had a sister that was getting married, if he went to the wedding, then he'd have to come back and quarantine for 14 days and miss a ton of games. It's, let's unpack what that means. And can we recreate on the other side of the bubble some way for you to celebrate with your sister that maybe the Lakers can be a part of, to recreate that moment. And that was a redemptive thing where ultimately we won the championship and the NBA allowed family members to come, and his sister was able to come and see her brother win a championship.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, wow.

Rob Pelinka:

That got redeemed. Players would... in the middle, there was no laundry mats there or anything like that. In the middle of the night, I'd get a text, "Hey, I'm out of my T-shirts and boxers, how do I get x, y, and z?" And it's just, "Okay, we want to help you with whatever you need. We want to make this smooth. It's the little things that matter." And I think players know, when they feel cared for just like customers they know when they feel cared for.

Carey Nieuwhof:

How did that become your approach?

Rob Pelinka:

I think it goes back to that mosaic of life. I think all of your learnings over the years, clearly as a person of faith, I think of an author like Kathleen Norris, who says, "don't call yourself a person of faith, don't call yourself a Christian, or call yourself Jewish, or whatever your... let other people see those qualities in you." And I think as a Christian in my case, just the qualities we learn about in the Gospel of service and humility and compassion and empathy. If you can really put those into your life and others can see it, like St. Francis of Assisi says, "Preach and only use words, if you have to." I think, living that way, if people see that it's so impactful. I try to orient myself to that every morning. I think we all have probably different practices with how we start the day but for me with a 12 year old son and a 10 year old daughter and being married, the early, early hours have become precious, 5:00am and getting up... For me it's reorienting our mindset to those qualities every day.

Rob Pelinka:

Looking at life through the lens of, "Hey, I have the privilege of being an instrument in God's hands, and how are you going to use this day?" The last thing I want to do is put myself at the center of this day and my plans, because then it's going to go horribly wrong. But if I can empty myself and just be an instrument, then man, the day takes on an adventure. For me, that's starting with meditation and journaling and scripture. I used to look at it maybe when I was in high school or college, the Richard Foster, spiritual disciplines, and these are the things you have to do. But now for me, it's I can't wait to get up because it's a gift. And I can't go without it. Just starting my day that way.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's kind of life support, isn't it Rob?

Rob Pelinka:

It really is. It really is Carey.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I hear you. Let's go back a couple years. The Lakers haven't won, they're not living up to the reputation, their potential, you get brought in. What are some of the first changes you made? So you're serving people, you're like, "We're going to look after all the players." What were some of the other looking back on it? The key moments that led to the World Championship in 2020?

Rob Pelinka:

It was creating that culture, I don't need to revisit that. But the other thing then is, building a sports team is, I used this analogy the other night. Watching a Netflix show about chess playing, it was a master chess player, it's this show.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Was that Queens Gambit?

Rob Pelinka:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, we're working through that right now too.

Rob Pelinka:

Yeah. And really like building a roster and a coaching staff, it's how do I assemble all of these chess pieces on the board for it to be an effective game? Part of that is there's 30 teams in the NBA, so you've got to study 29 other teams, chess boards, because you're going to be playing against them, right. You got to analyze their pieces and how they fit together and how they move around. And then your own in terms of how you build a roster. And it's complicated, because there's a salary cap, meaning you can only spend so much money and you've really got to be smart with how you put all that together. But, for us, the first thing I started working with Magic Johnson, who was the president of the team and a great, great friend, and amazing person. And the first thing we needed to do was clear the deck. And there

were a lot of pieces on the board that maybe weren't providing the value we needed, so we had to get them off and create what's called salary cap space to rebuild the team.

Rob Pelinka:

There was a process of cleaning house a little bit at the beginning, and then bringing in the players that we thought stood for what the Lakers excellence and championship level basketball is. It took a little bit of time to do it, I don't think anyone expected us to win a championship in our third year. I look back on 2020 and it just feels like in many ways, God's hand was on this season. And of course, there was the extraordinary tragedies around January 26th. There was the social unrest and things that our nation was going through, that the world was going through, the pandemic. I do see this title as having redemptive pieces to some of those really, really hard things. That work that was put in two, three years ago leading to this, certainly feels like grace.

Carey Nieuwhof:

One of your jobs is you manage a lot of egos, a lot of talent, millions, maybe hundreds of millions of dollars. What are some keys to navigating all of that? Because that's really complicated.

Rob Pelinka:

Yeah, it really is. It gets really down to mindset and how you're carrying yourself through the day. In the bubble, in the medical bubble of Orlando, I read N.T. Wright's book on the Apostle Paul.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's a thick book, man. You had a lot of time.

Rob Pelinka:

So much of his conclusions in that biography about Paul or that he spent... Paul spent an extraordinary amount of time teaching us about where we center our thoughts and holding thoughts captive and thinking of heavenly things. And just so much of our day, I think, especially as leaders where it's packed with complexities and things are being flashed at us, and it's how are we managing our thought life and making sure that we're holding our thought life accountable to the principles we want to live by? I think that's really, really important in leadership positions and has been helpful to me in so many ways, and it's something I think about throughout my day.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What do you do when your value system and I'm getting a picture of your value system in this conversation. But not everybody on a team would buy into that? There's some guys who like, "No, Rob, I'm the deal. All right. You pay me x million dollars a year, and my face is all over ESPN every night and I'm the league leader." How do you get that to gel in a team setting when not everybody shares those values?

Rob Pelinka:

It's definitely how you live it out. It's bringing in other people that you feel like share those same qualities. We have a head coach who is, he's a really optimistic person, his thought life is very optimistic. A lot of coaches can be cantankerous or finger pointers, but we identified him and this is a good anecdotal story that will let you into his lens. We won the world championship in mid October of 2020.

And then, as soon as I got home, I hadn't seen my family for 100 days, which is hard. It gave you a deeper sense of appreciation for members of the military and people that are away from their family long term. But I got home and then the way the NBA calendar works because of this pandemic, is we had to quickly turn to the NBA Draft to draft players and then quickly turn to NBA free agency to resign contracts and build the team again for the 2021 season.

Rob Pelinka:

I had a number of people around me saying, "Gosh, you're working so hard on the other side of the bubble, you don't even get to savor the 2020 championship, and the rings and the banner. You're just throwing yourself right into 2021." And I shared that with our coach, Coach Vogel, who's the optimist. And again, it's a mindset thing. And he said, "Oh, don't buy into that mindset." He said, "We get to savor the Lakers 2020 World Championship forever." I think to answer your question, it's surrounding yourself with people that share those qualities and have the same mindset I think is really, really important. Really important.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Anything else you learned in the Orlando bubble, the 100 day quarantine, the playing under those conditions that you think might speak into your future leadership when things move into more sane times. Anything that you're like, "Oh, that was a great lesson."

Rob Pelinka:

Yeah, just how incredibly powerful proximity to others and community and togetherness is and leadership. You can't lead from an ivory tower. If you think about it, we were in a hotel and so you get up in the morning and to your right, maybe as the team medical trainer, to your left is LeBron James, down the hall is the head equipment guy getting the uniform ready. It felt like a college campus. But the closeness and the daily togetherness, as we were going into the games and in the wins and losses was probably something that will never get duplicated in sports again, because we all go home to our houses and get in our cars and leave the game. But in this case, it's let's get on the bus and go back to the hotel together. Even though again from a mindset perspective, even though we're some things that the pandemic caused us to lose with the 2020 World Championship, like a parade for all the Lakers fans, which would have brought a million people into the streets, there were also extraordinary things gained.

Rob Pelinka:

Just the shared experience of going through a world championship on a daily basis in a hotel together, I think that's a book that maybe someday gets written that I don't think other sports teams will ever experience. There were some gifts. And then for me, I think the other thing I learned coming out of the bubble, when you don't have the distractions and the comforts of family, or taking your dog on a walk around the block, the things that you can take a break from being on and work, because in the bubble, there was no break. If you left to go outside, there was another team and their coach and you're on having a conversation about the game. If you went around the corner maybe some of your colleagues would be there, there was no escape, it was 100 days of work environment.

Rob Pelinka:

I really realized how important those things are to a holistic approach to leadership, to be able to come home into the comforts of your kids, your family, reading a book by the fire, taking your dog on a walk. One of the graces in that is, I have a 12 year old son and he plays basketball and so my points of

connection with him are off the chart. We can always find commonality. And then my 10 year old daughter has a whole different wiring, and she likes time with dad. And I was praying before the bubble a lot, maybe for a year of gosh, "God, I want to see new ways to connect with Emory." And it's so easy with my son Darren. When we were separated for 100 days, we got to get reunited in the bubble. There was actually a hotel and then there was this wooden bridge out to a restaurant where you could eat. And they allowed the families when we won the championship to meet us at that restaurant after the game to celebrate. I hadn't seen my family for 100 days.

Rob Pelinka:

And I'll never forget the dock was long to the restaurant. I got off the bus at the hotel and I knew my family was waiting in the restaurant and I started jogging down the dock and my 10 year old daughter, it's almost like a scene out of the movie or something, she left the restaurant and she came sprinting towards me. And about halfway jumped up and hugged me and started crying and she's not an emotional... she started crying and she was like, "Daddy, I never want to live life again without you." It's that moment, we've had this just unbelievable connection on the other side of the bubble. Just sometimes as we all know, you can go through extraordinarily different circumstances and hard circumstances in life, but it can lead to these unexpected graces that just come. And you know that from the Lord.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's awesome. You have done something that the vast majority of listeners haven't, which is to win a World Championship, and to be at that place. I think we've all had moments of victory that were, "Oh, wow, we finally did whatever was on our list to do, right." What were some of the unique joys and some of the unique challenges or surprises that come with winning at the highest level?

Rob Pelinka:

Yeah. I've listened to some of your other extraordinary podcasts. I know the other day, Beth Moore was talking about social media and the praise and criticism and living with that. When you're in a position of professional sports, especially for a brand like the Lakers, that is a world renowned brand, all over the globe. The players, the head coach and the general manager, they become under the fire of public scrutiny and sports radio talk. At the beginning of this, I remember I told... I made a vow to my wife, Kristen, I said, "Hey, I think it's going to be really, really important that we hold each other accountable." That when the times are good and you're getting the praise and people are saying wonderful things is to not tune into that because then you're going to get big headed and prideful. And we all know what that leads to, arrogance and all those awful qualities. At the same time when the critics come out and I've been through that side as well, like any public figure. The attacks come is to not buy into those and then start to get discouraged or self doubting.

Rob Pelinka:

Really stay away from those polls. And where do we find ourselves committed to? It's the work. Just get lost in the process of the work and try to block that noise out as much as possible. For me on the championship run in the bubble, it was interesting, Carey, because you'd play these incredible games, and everyone in the world watching and you'd get back to your hotel room. And if it was a loss, it would feel like the end of the world especially the NBA Finals. Because again, you didn't have anyone to comfort and console you. I just had to get into this place where I had put my plans for the Lakers at the

center. And God had a lesson to teach me, which is, it's not... it's thy will be done, not my will be done. And I had really put, my Lakers GM, this is how it should happen.

Rob Pelinka:

I know, this is what you want God, at the center and quickly learned when I was able to surrender that to more of that, "thy will be done" mindset, that's when the beautiful thing started happening. That was definitely a learning lesson in the bubble too.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, it's interesting because doing research for this interview, I was on Twitter and Twitter is not known for being kind. And people were saying wonderful things about you. Greatest manager of all time, best GM in the league, you're the GOAT, that thing. Do you pay attention to that at all? Or do you have people who monitor that for you? Or you're just keep my head down, do the work?

Rob Pelinka:

I think we're all human, so that stuff affects us. But as much as possible, I think, again, going back to Paul and some of his teachings, I think, on the criticism side to that, I've been on both sides, and you point out some positive ones, but you can find negative ones too. And I think that's just the case with most public figures. But when it comes to the negative side, one of the learning lessons that I as a person of faith, I think, there's Paul's teaching about there is no condemnation for those that find themselves rooted in God's love and in the Lord. That verse, or truth really took on new meaning to me through some of the criticism chapters, which is, say what you want about me positive or negative, but especially from a condemnation standpoint, it's not going to impact me because my identity is elsewhere.

Rob Pelinka:

If you really are living a life where your identity is being a child of God, and your source of power is in God's love and being used as an instrument in his hands, that stuff doesn't really play a big role, and it's very freeing. It's very freeing.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, wouldn't be, and you're being thrust into the heart of some of the biggest stuff on this planet, right. It's not, "Oh, yeah, you know we did this little tiny thing at this little, z division school." It was like, "No, no, no. this like big league. This is big stuff." I got to ask you just from a strategy standpoint, and again, a lot of my leaders listening, the leaders know a lot more about this than I do. But yet you just come off a world championship, you win it, you as you say, you're into the trade season, the free agency. Almost every commentator that I could see said that you made the team stronger. You just won a world championship, then you went out, did a whole bunch of deals, you made the team stronger.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I'm curious, why did you pursue making the team even more successful? I don't mean that to be like a simple question. But a lot of people might say, "Oh, we can get two or three years out of this." What was your thinking behind making all those deals?

Rob Pelinka:

Carey, at the beginning of the interview, you told me you weren't a sports aficionado, but your questions show that you are becoming one because that's a great insight that you saw that we made our team better.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Just a bit of research, that's all.

Rob Pelinka:

It's interesting, I think it gets to the concept of complacency and leadership. I think I remember learning lessons from basketball players like Michael Jordan, from the Bulls and Kobe on the Lakers, but they would often talk about in some of these were conversations I had in person, others is just learning through reading interviews and books. But how they felt like the mastery of their game would come in the off-season. And here's what they meant is they would perfect a move on the court, maybe a fade-away jump shot or a hesitation, pull up three pointer, these are advanced concepts, but they would create a move in the off-season that they would use to destroy their opponents all season long. But then the defense and the competition catches up to that. And they say, "Okay, we are going to find a way to take that away." I think it's the same thing with team-building is when you win a championship a certain way, you know that there's 30 teams in the NBA, you're one of them.

Rob Pelinka:

The other 29 teams are going to find ways to say, "Hey, how do we take away the Lakers advantages in the way they won a championship?" I think it's having countermoves, to what you did well and it's not strained from your core competencies in your core culture. Our head coach has defined our team as a defense-first team, that theme will remain. But how do we make moves around the edges knowing that the competition is going to try to take away some of our strengths? And not being complacent to just say, "Oh, we can sit back, we won, we can continue to win. We don't need to do anything new." I think great leaders and great companies are always evolving and always reinventing parts of themselves. I think that's one of the things that went into the thinking around going from the 2020 team that won the world championship to a 2021 team, Lakers team, that's different, but better.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Do you tend to be a leader who has... do you take it season by season? And obviously, at some level I think you would have to, right? Because injuries, retirements, all that stuff plays into the mix, and then what other teams do. But do you have... do you tend to think in a two to three year vision? Or do you have other things that you're moving toward? Are you read those things in the moment?

Rob Pelinka:

I think more of a fluid. I'm more of a fluid thinker. I think that, like a game of chess or a sports game, you never know exactly how it's going to play out because different things transpired during the game. I think with this particular line of business, to your point, there's so many unexpected things that can happen, an injury, a trade, different things can come up, that I try to stay nimble and fluid in terms of all of that. That doesn't mean you're reactionary, you're always prepared. We are methodically prepared. When we go into an NBA Draft or a trade, or a trade deadline or free agency period. We have reams and reams of articulated strategic blueprints and plans that have been thought through for months. It's a combination of staying fluid, but also being incredibly prepared when moments come your way that you've thought through them ahead of time.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It seems to me, Rob, that you've got some great personal disciplines. You talk about getting up in the morning, reading scripture, having that quiet time. I'm sure you look to be incredibly fit from what I can see. But I'd love to talk about the role of conditioning. It's a bit of a strange direction, I want to talk about sleep. Some of the stuff that I've read online and feel free to correct it is that LeBron James will spend up to a million 1,000,005 on conditioning, and that he'll sleep up to 12 hours a day between a solid night's sleep and a nap to prepare. Sleep's something I take really seriously and think about. I'd love to know what you think about preparation for on court time and preparation even for your own leadership. Can you comment on that for a little while?

Rob Pelinka:

Yeah, I think that that level of detail and preparation is essential. I think when you meet the genius leaders, these are the .001 percenters, there's no detail of their life or their day that hasn't been thoughtfully unpacked, turned around, thought through with a plan. The great players, LeBron and Michael Jordan and Magic Johnson and Kobe. It's not like they just show up and play. The systems that they have around them from their dietary and nutritional plan, to their sleep plan, to their body recovery plans, a lot of them talk about, prehab. It's not like I get injured and then I rehab it. How do I stay in front of a possible injury? I think to be truly great at anything in life, you have to pour all of yourself into it and it is jaw dropping to see what some of these guys do. Of course try to put some of those practices into you know your own life with proper rest and a proper sleep schedule and proper nutritional schedule.

Rob Pelinka:

I think when you're a leader of course other people are going to be looking to you for guidance. I think it's important to live what you preach. That's just how I've been. I'm more wired as probably a type A perfectionist and that can be a gift and a curse. But it does... but I know how important too. I'm married to more of an adventurer on Enneagram scale, she's more the, I think it's the Three or the partier, every moment is a party. It's the perfect compliment. She's great at making sure I don't stay so locked in that I become robotic.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Are you a one? Do you know your type Rob?

Rob Pelinka:

I would have to dig back. I think that sounds right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Perfectionism would be a one.

Rob Pelinka:

For me I do have to force myself into adventure and work breaks. But for me that comes in spending time with the kids and I'm a very avid reader and fiction, nonfiction. You talked at the beginning of, "Hey, how have you shaped yourself?" It's you pull from random things. One of my favorite novels is Les Mis by Victor Hugo. One of my favorite fictional characters of all time is the Bishop. I've had patches as a leader where people have said, "Oh gosh, you really showed a lot of grace in this I don't know how

you've done that?" You just think about all the things you experience in life and as you read. The bishop in that story of course has extraordinary grace when he could you know frame Jean Valjean for stealing the silver candles, but he basically tells a police officer, "No, he forgot to take these two." And with that moment of grace transforms this criminal's life into a person that changes multitudes of other people's lives in positive ways. I think that's probably the core of all of our missions I think as leaders is how do we lead with those qualities.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You mentioned jaw-dropping habits of some of these players when you look at how meticulous and ridiculous they get in terms of their preparation for a game, their rhythms, routines and habits. Without telling tales out of school you got one or two you feel comfortable sharing? Just some really ninja practices?

Rob Pelinka:

Yeah. I think with LeBron, you see him... he'll play a game and then you'll see the next morning he may be in the weight room, spending an hour on his body. Most people would just, "Hey, I just need to rest." But just the way they attack things I think... Kobe if he would have... there's legendary stories. If he would have an off-shooting game at Staples Center in Los Angeles when all the reporters in the crowd left he would grab the ball boy or the trainer and go back out in the darkness at night and make the shot he missed maybe that cost the team the game, make that 500 times before he could go to bed. Just these meticulous ways of always getting ahead and striving to be great. It really is inspiring to see these guys and the level they put in to being the best in the world at what they do.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Do you have any habits that you would say, obviously your scripture reading and your morning time but any that you say, "Okay, this is probably bordering on extreme." Anything like that, that really helps you, that other people looking in might go, "Huh, what's that about?"

Rob Pelinka:

You have to ask my wife that one because she probably make fun of half of my habits. I think throughout the day I tend to stay really, really busy and so part of that nutrition. I may instead of sitting down for the big two hour celebration lunch that would make me want to take a nap at 2:00, I may do the... grab a power smoothie and maybe some raw nuts or something and eat healthy and keep moving. I think trying to stay adaptive and trying to be healthy and eat a lot of little things throughout the day to not bog myself down I think my wife and kids would make fun of me for that. But maybe that's...

Carey Nieuwhof:

Favorite books, Rob? You're an avid reader, any you would recommend? It's like, "Wow, if you're going to read some books this year, make sure you check these few out."

Rob Pelinka:

I'm sitting by my bookshelf. I think some of the authors that I've loved so much over the years, I think Philip Yancey and Tim Keller has been amazing, CS Lewis, George MacDonald. I'm a big Thomas Merton fan. Dallas Willard and his books have shaped my life. So that would be more on the nonfiction. Then I just love stories and novels and I love Dickens, The Tale of Two Cities is one of my favorites. I've

mentioned Victor Hugo Les Mis, Dostoevsky, The Brothers K. Those are stories I read over and over and find new nuggets every time I read them that I do love to read. I do love to read.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's great. Do you read leadership books as well or you tend more towards spiritual and fiction?

Rob Pelinka:

Probably more towards spiritual and fiction. I do also love to read great biographies. I love-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, me too.

Rob Pelinka:

Yeah. Nelson Mandela's autobiography is one of my favorites. Chuck Colson's biography, of course, is a classic and in one of the great stories. If you want a sports biography that is incredibly moving, Andre Agassi's Open is one of my favorite biographies of all time and I highly recommend that one too.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay. I have not read that, but I've had it recommended, I'll have to check that out. We'll link to all of those in the show notes as well. Rob, anything you want to share with leaders? I'm thinking about your point about being agile, because when you really think about all the other teams making moves, your players have good years and bad years. I'd love because I think we're moving into an agile year and I do a lot of coaching of leaders on agility and I think my natural default is to find what worked and try to milk that as long as I possibly can. So trying to stay agile as a leader myself, any final words on one or two keys to agility for leaders?

Rob Pelinka:

Yeah, I think part of agility in some sense, Carey is just getting back to that mindset of emptying yourself a little bit. We are all as leaders, instruments in the creator's hands. And you've been used as an instrument to take all these different stories in life and bring them to one place, where all of us can listen to them and stay agile, because we learn. So you've been used in that way and encouraged so many people and so many leaders and we're also appreciative of that. And I think that's probably through a lens of you trying to figure out, what is this life all about? And how did I end up here? I think for me, I grew up in a small town in Illinois.

Rob Pelinka:

And I think, if you start like the kids' little drawings that you do when you're in grade school of taking the maze and using your pencil to go from point A to point Z, I think of my journey, how did I end up from a little town in Illinois to being the general manager of the World Championship, Los Angeles Lakers? I think looking at that maze, it'd be like taking a Swiss watch and disassembling it and throwing it into the Sahara Desert and the wind blows, and all of a sudden, the watch comes back together. That's how unlikely that journey is, and so you realize that it's only because you're an instrument in God's hands and he's weaving together a story. But I think the more we can put ourselves in that framework to start the day, we'll be agile because then it's not the lens of, "how can I dominate and control this day?" Then you're not agile.

Rob Pelinka:

Then you're motivated by that self voice and narcissism and all of those things. But if it's more, "how can I be used as an instrument to make other people's lives better, and the people that I work with?" Then you can stay agile, and I think that's been the key for me.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's a really good word to young leaders to... I think, was in the Eagles' Netflix Documentary years ago where Joe Walsh said, and I'm paraphrasing because he was asked about his journey to success and as a member of the Eagles. And I think he said, "At the time, it just felt like random chaos. But looking back on it, it's like a beautifully orchestrated poem." And I look at my life as a young leader, and it's like, "Yeah, how did I end up here? How did I end up interviewing you? How did you end up being a listener? How did all of that happen?" I have no idea. But that idea of, oh, this looks kind of interesting why don't we try this for a little while? There's a lot of wisdom in that. And I think staying agile as you get older is even more of a discipline.

Rob Pelinka:

I love that. I love the poem metaphor. I do think that the world is wants all of us to get caught up in, "what's the future hold?" I think there's so much comfort in that figuring out God's will for your life is not your responsibility. If you really start your day open and empty, that will be revealed to you, that's God's promise. And so it's flipping the lens, and it is we all can be grateful that when you look in the rear view mirror of life, you can see those seeds of faithfulness throughout. And it's so important, I think to be mindful of those things, to face the uncertainties and unpredictabilities, and the fears of the future is to look at the faithfulness in all of our past.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, I know we get to follow you in the papers. I know we get to follow you online through media outlets. But are you active on social? Is there a place where you tend to show up, or you just do your job day-to-day? I guess the question I'm asking is where can people learn more about you online?

Rob Pelinka:

I'm probably pretty old school, Carey, but maybe you'll have to give me some lessons about getting a little bit more active on social someday. If we continue to have success maybe I'll open up that avenue if you-

Carey Nieuwhof:

I love it. Rob, thanks for doing this really long press conference and all these atypical questions. It's been an absolute joy to get to know you a little bit. Thank you for reaching out and saying, hey. And what a thrill to have this conversation with you.

Rob Pelinka:

Thanks, Carey continued blessings on your show. I won't listen to this one, but the ones that come after I'll be excited to listen to.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Rob, I'm grateful.

Rob Pelinka:

All right. See you, buddy.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, that really was a very special conversation, really struck by Rob's humility in the midst of all of this, just the level headedness he has. And I'll remember this one for years to come. And hey, we have transcripts and show notes. You can go to careynerrynieuwhof.com/episode393. I've also got a, What I'm Thinking About Segment, I'm going to share with you a few qualities and characteristics I see I'm almost... I think I've interviewed 500 leaders now. I want to give you some of the qualities and characteristics I see continually in highly effective leaders. So that's coming up in just a moment. Hey, we have a fresh episode coming up next time. I just love being able to do this. And next time, we're going to talk to Hannah Brancher. Her first public speaking event was a TED talk in New York City when she was 24 years old. Fast forward to a few years from now, she reflects on what she's learned as a communicator, all about millennials, their addiction to platform, and the future of what her generation wants in digital and physical interaction. It was a fascinating conversation. Here's an excerpt.

Hannah Brancher:

I'm surrounded by scientists and botanists and Nobel Prize winning. And I'm just this girl with a mail crate. And he started talking to me and maybe getting to the root of, "okay, let's push past some of this prose and let's just have a conversation here." And I said something about my mother, which ends up being the introduction to the talk, but he was like "that, right there. I want you to start with your mom. I want you to tell us about your mom, I want you to go in right there," And it changed the whole direction of the talk.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Subscribers, you won't miss that. If you're new to the podcast, many of you are. It's beginning of a new year. Just hit subscribe, and you won't miss a thing. And here's what you won't miss, Seth Godin, Craig Rochelle, Christine Nockels, John Kotter from Harvard Business School, Michael Arrieta at Cal Newport, Jon Acuff. Yeah, we even got a couple of executives from NASA coming on the podcast this year. Yeah, we're mixing it up a little bit. I'm so excited to bring you this year's lineup. And subscribers, you get it for free. Thank you for leaving ratings and reviews. Thanks for telling friends. If this meant something to you, tag me. Rob is not on social, but you can give him a shout out as well. And so thankful for your interaction online. Well, it's time for What I'm Thinking About. And we're going to talk about the qualities and characteristics of highly effective leaders. It's brought to you by Pro Media Fire.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Book your free digital strategy session today at promediafire.com/church-growth. And by ServeHQ, go to servehq.church to start your free 14-day trial of their online subscription tools for churches and nonprofits, and use the code Carey, C-A-R-E-Y to get 10% off for life.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Hundreds of interviews in, having spent years with some of the top leaders in the world and in leadership, what am I noticing about great leaders? Well, there's some really surprising and endearing characteristics, and it's not what you think. So generally speaking, here's what they do. They show up on time. Yeah, believe it or not, punctuality is a feature of great leaders. And if they can't, they let you

know. That is something that I really struggled with as a young leader. It would be like, "Well, I'm busy. Traffic was bad." Just build some margin and show up on time. Number two, they do their homework. I am amazed, a lot of you probably heard the Andy Stanley interview. Like Andy, he gets his questions a week in advance. And Andy's got notes. Now, he's great. I mean, he just talks like it's just rolling off the top of his head. But my goodness, do some of these leaders ever do their prep? They do their homework, so pay attention to that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I tend to be a little more freewheeling. But well, for an interview like this with Rob, even though I wasn't like a basketball guy, I spent a long time getting ready for this interview. Do your homework, that's something they do. You know what else is really personal? They call you by name. You're not just another appointment, you're not just someone else on, "who am I seeing now? What's your name?" They call you by name. And you will be amazed if you go back and listen to these episodes time and time again, even if I'm meeting someone for the first time they'll say, "That's an interesting question, Carey." And they'll remember. They won't be like, "what's your name, again?" They take the time to be very personal.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Another thing that's really powerful is they're okay not being good at everything. For the most part, they realize, "my leadership has a very narrow lane. I'm very good at a few things. I'm not very good at a lot of other things," and they're cool with that. They also follow through fast. I am shocked sometimes, Seth Godin was a great example, Rob also followed up by email immediately with a couple of thoughts he had. These guys are on it, these women are on it, and they follow through fast. So if you're like, "Oh, yeah, I got all these unread messages," and it's like, you might want to think about your system because I find that top leaders will get back to you super quickly.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Number six, they take their work, not themselves seriously. Of all the things of this interview with Rob that I remember is he has just somehow stayed so grounded, and he takes his work really seriously, but he doesn't take himself very seriously. And I see a lot of leaders who don't operate at a very high level. They take themselves very seriously, but not more seriously than their work. Jim Collins identified humility as the difference between level four and level five leader, and I think you saw that in today's interview in spades. Then finally, they're incredibly down to earth. I think when you really get behind the veneer, you expect all these people who have success and fame and all that. And I've found that the leaders who go the furthest are often the most humble. And humility is one of the main characteristics that I pulled away from my conversation with Rob, and with so many other leaders on this podcast. If you're thinking about how to improve your own leadership, those are some things I would really be paying attention to.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Hey, I hope you really enjoyed this conversation, this episode. Thank you so much for listening. I can't wait to do it again. And I hope our time together today has helped you lead like never before.

Announcer:

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

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