

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 400 of the podcast. My name is Carey Nieuwhof and I hope our time together today helps you lead like never before. My guest is Harvard's John Kotter, the world-leading expert on change, which I think is going to be fascinating today. And today's episode is brought to you by BELAY. You can text my name, Carey, to 31996 to get your free download of BELAY's delegation planner and start reclaiming your free time. And by Pro Media Fire. Book your free digital strategy session today at promediafire.com/churchgrowth.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, back when I started out in leadership, I started at some very small churches that needed a lot of change. Some of you know that story, I mean, they were small. You think you're leading a small company, small church, we had average attendance of six at one of the churches, 14 at the second and 23 at the mega church. Really small, nothing had changed in the last 40 years. I came in as this 30-year-old leader who had to figure out how to change everything. And fortunately for me, in 1996, the year after I started, John Kotter released a book called, *Leading Change*, and somehow I got ahold of it. It changed so much for me. A framework for leading change, it's still one of the classics on change all these years later.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I decided to reach out to John to see number one: if I could talk to him, and number two: if we could have a conversation all these years later on the podcast. And that's what we do today. John is widely regarded as the world's leading expert on change. He's a faculty member at Harvard Business School and graduate of MIT, and his books on change have sold millions of copies and his theory on change has been embraced by some of the most successful companies in this world. He is an entrepreneur and inspirational speaker, his ideas have helped mobilize people around the world to really deal with an increasingly rapid pace of change. And we talk about that in the conversation.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I think you're going to love this and at the end I'm coming back with seven things not to say when you're leading change. And we're all leading a lot of change today. That's at the very end of the podcast for those of you who listen all the way through. For those of you who are new, welcome. We have a lot of new people over the last month, and if you haven't subscribed yet, please do. We try to bring you world class conversations with world class leaders every single week. Sometimes a couple times a week. Today's episode, hopefully you'll find really helpful for you and your team. We have show notes for you and the like. Listen and subscribe wherever you get your podcasts and then if you would share on social, we're really grateful for that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It is a time of change and whether you're running a business, a church, a not for profit, let me ask you an important question that will determine your digital success this year. What's more important; online

content or strategy? Well, believe it or not, the key to growth online in 2021 is strategy, because content is everywhere. Your strategy for creative design, social media, online pathways is vital to drive growth, but how do you do it when you don't have an infinite budget or even a team that really has mastered strategy? Well, that's where Pro Media Fire can help. Pro Media Fire has an entire team of professionals providing digital strategy in a creative framework to help you grow online. They have 100s of clients, they know exactly what's working now and you can get a free strategy session by going to promediafire.com/churchgrowth.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Speaking of change, I've known Bryan and Shannon Miles over at BELAY for years now. I mean, a decade ago, a virtual assistant was a crazy idea. But talk about how things have changed. If you want to expand your time and your productivity, what if I told you that BELAY could help you have more time every week? Think of a few tasks you could delegate and I talk to high capacity leaders, they're like, "I'm terrible at delegating." But what if you could delegate your email inbox, scheduling, booking travel, planning meetings, expense reporting? Might sound a little scary, particularly for control freaks, but delegation is the cost of your sanity and the linchpin to the survival of organizations everywhere.

Carey Nieuwhof:

BELAY is an incredible organization revolutionizing productivity with their virtual assistants, bookkeeping and social media strategist service for church, not for profits and businesses, alike. And they're offering a free download of their incredible delegation planner today. All you have to do is text Carey to 31996. That's 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:

Well, without much further ado, let's jump into my conversation with Harvard Business School's John Kotter.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Dr. John Kotter, welcome to the podcast. As I shared with the audience and with you, it's a real honor to have you.

Dr. John Kotter:

No, it's my pleasure really, really.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, you've been such an influence in my life, having picked up, Leading Change. That came out in '96, didn't it? Was it the original publication?

Dr. John Kotter:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

One year into my leadership and for whatever reason it came across my radar screen, long before Amazon came along, and literally changed my life and have been using it to lead change. I'd love to start

here, why is change so hard? Almost every leader that's listening to this podcast is trying to change a company, a church, an organization, a team, someone's mind. Why is it so difficult?

Dr. John Kotter:

There are at least three reasons. One is that so much of it is coming at us more often, in more complex ways, requiring quicker responses. We can talk about that later on, but the trend upward goes way, way back and it has really accelerated in the last couple of decades. On the other hand, organizations as we know them, were not built to be rapid change machines. They were built to be efficient, reliable, machines that could ensure their survival. They're much more survive oriented, which means hold on to what you got, stabilize, et cetera, et cetera.

Dr. John Kotter:

Then you've got human beings. The people who have been studying the brain and the hormone system and the like over the last 20 or 30 years, now with increasing use of imaging and real data, if you read them carefully, the survive system in us is unbelievably powerful. Again, it tends to default toward what it knows, it defaults towards stability. We weren't constructed to be rapid change creatures. If you take a world that's moving faster and faster and faster, organizations that were not designed for that and people who tend to default more to just hold on, you've got a real challenge.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. All of that is true and I mean, a lot of leaders, particularly those in the church, I was leading 100 year old organizations. The churches had been around and they were the little red brick buildings and we sold them within the first five years and everything. But the resistance was significant. I was poking through getting ready for this interview, some of your other books, and I know in *Leading Change* and I know in *Our Iceberg is Melting*, you talk about the different groups associated with change. You have your early adopters, you've got a quiet majority in the middle, then you have some resisters and opponents. I think you call them Dr. No No in *Our Iceberg is Melting*. A little parable, a fable that you wrote.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Do you want to talk about that? Whenever you're navigating change, there's always an enthusiastic group, there's always a resister group and that was life changing for me. Has been for 25 years now.

Dr. John Kotter:

Well, and the fact that everybody doesn't totally appreciate that is one thing that gets them into trouble. It's not at all unreasonable to think, "Okay, I have to change," for example, "my organization, my church." Well, that means everybody, so I focus on everybody and assume they'll all go along at the same pace. But the study, the actual research shows that that is not what happens with any kind of significant change or any kind of innovation of any magnitude. You tend to get this pattern of a few percentage that jump onboard very quickly and very easily; early adopters or innovators or something. Then four or five groups all the way toward the laggard laggards.

Dr. John Kotter:

The number of change efforts by good people who are trying to do something that's useful, that get bogged down and ultimately fail because somebody tries to move the laggards along with the

innovators up front, because it just seems logical. We have to move together and the laggards, of course, just are anchors. Some of them never get pulled in. And those that do, it's when they discover they're in the 10% minority and everybody else has gone along. And there's enough proof at that point that this thing is working. Even somebody who's very inclined to be cautious when it comes to change, can be won over because they can see not only do all of these people, have they moved in a new direction, but it's working.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I think a lot of leaders, and I've found this in myself, we get stuck or a little bit paralyzed or fearful of the opponents, the laggards and we wish everybody was an early adopter. The people who applaud you, that kind of thing. What are some good strategies for dealing with the tension between the early adopters who are ready to go and the laggards or the opponents who are resistant or even angry about change and vocal about it?

Dr. John Kotter:

Right. One strategy is to look around your organization and find a project or a group or a unit that is filled with the early adopters and just focus on them at first to get some momentum going. Don't even talk to the laggards about it. That's one strategy. Corporations sometimes use if there's an important laggard on the executive committee, deciding they need to open up an office in Singapore and that he is clearly or she is clearly the right person. It's a kind way of getting them out of the way.

Dr. John Kotter:

Another way, which is counterintuitive, is to invite everybody in a room, including the laggards, and allowing them to in a sense, be irrational jerks in front of the crowd. But the trick is, you've got to maintain your cool and be straightforward, honest, thoughtful and it can win over some of the people that are in the middle, if you will, because they can see the contrast. But that requires obviously, some emotional maturity and control on your part and a little bit of fearlessness.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's really interesting, John, because that takes me back to 1998 when we first proposed selling these historic three buildings. And of course, the church is a volunteer organization, so I was the only one on the payroll at the time. It's not like I was leading staff, I'm leading all volunteers. We don't have congregational meetings anymore, we have a very large church now and very different governance structure. But we had congregational meetings and I remember had to go to the congregation. I remember standing there one night in one of the churches and people just lined at the microphone to yell at me. And they did.

Carey Nieuwhof:

For whatever reason, I do not claim emotional maturity as a 32, 33 year old, but I read your book and I kept my mouth shut. I just like, "Mm-hmm (affirmative)-, thank you, thank you. Those are good points. Thank you. Okay, anyone else?" And someone else would yell at me. "Thank you, thank you, mm-hmm (affirmative)-, that's great." After the meeting I had so many people come up and say, "How did you hold your cool?" Like, "What did you do?" I thought, "Oh, this is just the grace of God," or whatever. But it won the crowd over. Is that what you're talking about?

Dr. John Kotter:

Right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow! Yeah, and that's really hard. This is the thing that surprises me too, you remember I've led a volunteer organization, now I run a company these days, everyone's on the payroll and then you have your audience, and eventually you have staff. But change is a problem in volunteer organizations, it's a problem in companies, it's a problem with employees in office towers and factories. It's more of a human condition, is it not?

Dr. John Kotter:

Oh, without question. And a human condition, to repeat something I said a few minutes ago, that is just growing and growing. Well, the spike we got in late March, early April 2020, certainly provided some evidence to people who thought talk about a changing world was overdone. No, it's under-talked actually, it's under-done. And we're going to see more spikes, they won't be pandemics necessarily, but that's the future. The future's going to continue to move at us faster, with more things that are hard to predict in advance, requiring more agility, adaptability, thinking ahead of the curve from institutions and from us individually.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Let's talk about the pandemic a little bit in 2020 and the global crisis that we're still disentangling ourselves from and not quite on the other side of. You're right, I mean, would you agree, we've interviewed at this point, dozens of guests on my podcast about the pandemic and the acceleration of the pace of change. Is this the fastest leap you've seen in your lifetime and your leadership experience in change acceleration? Or have there been other windows of time where you think it's been as great?

Dr. John Kotter:

I think the last two weeks in March and the first two weeks in April is probably the biggest spike that I've seen in my lifetime. Not that there weren't others, but that's the biggest one.

Carey Nieuwhof:

How did the dynamics or do the dynamics of change themselves change when the pace gets accelerated that quickly? What shifts in that framework?

Dr. John Kotter:

Well, the stakes go up when you make mistakes, obviously. But also, they go up on the plus side. That is to say, in a spiking scenario if you can, see the opportunity. Change always produces threats, but it always produces opportunities too. If you can see the opportunities and mobilize people to not run away or freeze, but to get excited about those opportunities and start to work toward capitalizing on them, the upside is incredible. This consulting company that I helped co-found 11 years ago, I mean, the stories that we get on a regular basis of what some of our clients have been able to do by following the emerging science of change that we're trying to pioneer, the most memorable thing is the number of times you hear again and again, the client didn't think it was possible.

Dr. John Kotter:

I just read a communication literally within the last week of somebody who had been trying to change something for decades. Probably not decades, but a long time. They managed to, with a little guidance from us, do it plus more in less than 100 days. The thing I worry about is I can see already coming out of the pandemic or where we are, getting ready to come out of the pandemic, that some people, not many, are doing a pretty darn good job of finding those opportunities. Mobilizing people and achieving something they didn't think was possible and getting either mission relevant results or economic results if they're a business. And some people are just really struggling. The rich get richer and the poor get poorer syndrome has got another tailwind associated with it that's now how well you're handling this change.

Dr. John Kotter:

Certainly don't want to bring down the people who are doing a great job. We should be cheering them and getting them more publicity so others can copy. But bringing up the mean and the people that are really struggling, if we don't, I mean, society is going to have some real challenges in the next decade or more.

Carey Nieuwhof:

We're going to get into your eightfold framework that you've been teaching for 25 years, but I would love to know the difference in the mindset or the approach of a leader who has seen it as an opportunity and a leader who has been paralyzed by the obstacles. Because I think you're right and I think if all of us think about leaders we know, we can see leaders who said, "Okay, now we get to do this," and they had actually, despite the circumstances, a very strong year. Perhaps even grew their cause, their mission, their business. And then others who just froze, deer in the headlights, are struggling very badly.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Can you talk about the differences in the qualities and characteristics between those two leaders in your view?

Dr. John Kotter:

Well, one for sure is that the ones who are doing better under these conditions talk more, think more about opportunities than the other even under normal conditions or slow moving conditions. They just think not just "what's the problem that's landed in my office today," but "what are the opportunities for us as an organization to do something that's mission relevant and important?" They also are more likely to believe that more people are needed rather than less to be able to turn the ship, if you will.

Carey Nieuwhof:

In other words, a coalition?

Dr. John Kotter:

Oh, yeah, yeah. And then from there to build on out and open up the opportunity for people to participate in change initiatives beyond the usual suspects, so to speak. They just naturally think it's going to take a lot of us working on the same page to be able to pick up this car and carry it across the road. I mean, it's a huge task.

Dr. John Kotter:

I think a third one is they appreciate more the power of positive emotions in their capacity to be sustainable over time for keeping us energized. See, I can get your attention and get you to do something in the short term by scaring you or hitting you over the head. Leave the room. Bam! You'll get mad, afraid, your energy will go up, you'll be out of that room so fast away from my club. But that is not a strategy for being able to maintain energy for a period of time to be able to accomplish something big. If I run after you, to carry on with this dying metaphor, with my club, you'll just run harder and harder and at a certain point you start to get fatigued pretty quickly even if you're a jogger. You'll get stressed out and it's a mess.

Dr. John Kotter:

But positive emotions, being passionate about something, being truly excited about something, that is a spike emotion in terms of energy level, but that can maintain itself for long periods of time, in which an institution can totally transform itself. That's another difference, I think.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, those are really good points and I think there's a difference between momentary hype and as you described that, again, you've studied this your whole career. I can see leaders who are consistently positive, consistently galvanizing people. It's not just, "Oh, I rallied the troop once and now it's back to normal operations." Are these skills that can be learned?

Dr. John Kotter:

That's always a good question. I think there probably are some people, but I think it's a pretty small group, who have because of their circumstances while growing up, who knows, maybe even because of their genes. I'm not an MD researcher. Who have a personality, et cetera that is just afraid and angry and negative and they just have a heck of a time. Even if you put them through a course, you're fighting personality, which is pretty stable.

Dr. John Kotter:

For a lot of other people I think it's a matter of taking what's in there and helping them connect to it and enlarge it. Virtually everybody has the capacity to get excited about something. How can I learn to connect with that and then use that and let that show when I'm talking to my colleagues about this change that I think we need to make without feeling so vulnerable that I back away?

Dr. John Kotter:

Opportunity is another one. It wouldn't hurt for a lot more people who are in leadership positions to have a sign in their office on the wall. Take this piece of art down and put up a sign that says something like, "What's our big opportunity?" No, we had a client in Europe, very interesting guy in an old industry that was not inclined to want to change. The older the industry, the more you can get stability. We helped his executive committee craft a statement of what they thought their big opportunity was. His office had glass on one side out to the hallway. Along the hallway in letters, what, maybe 15 inches tall, he had that slogan run all the way down the hallway. "Our big opportunity is -" Anybody in his office, and he would sit with his back to it so when they were looking at him they would also see behind him this thing. Everybody that walks down the hallway of course is stopping and trying to figure out what is this.

Dr. John Kotter:

We've proven people can be taught to think more about opportunity and to act more on opportunity. That part can be "taught." It's a mixed bag.

Carey Nieuwhof:

No, I get that. You know what, it's funny. As someone who's tried to practice this framework now for a while, years, decades, I find I've got both sides inside me. I think most people do, right? There are days where I can be negative and dour and see the problem. Then there are other days where I'm in the framework and teachings like yours help me realize, "Oh, no. When I focus on the opportunity I rally the team, I rally the troops, et cetera." That's helpful.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I want to ask you before we dive into the framework, Dr. Kotter, I'd love to know how did you get interested in this? How did this become your life, your career, your academics, the institute, the company you've now founded? What prompted you as a young academic to say, "Yeah, I'm going to focus on change"?

Dr. John Kotter:

It didn't start there. It started with I was curious. I got to see even before college, before I went to MIT that some institutions seem to do a lot better than others in achieving their mission. I was curious why. In college I ended up president of our fraternity. At MIT it wasn't quite Animal House by any stretch of the imagination. That meant at age 20, I was responsible for 70 people. For their room, their food, their studies. We did all kinds of mentoring and counseling for the younger people, for their social life. I mean, it was a total institution. And for two buildings in the back Bay of Boston, which today would be \$12 million worth of real estate at 20 years old.

Dr. John Kotter:

Again, I could see by looking at the fraternity system, that some places were run much better than others and I began to see the problems up close and get curious about that. That journey took me eventually around to concluding that one, not the only, but certainly one of the reasons that organizations and people outperformed others was their capacity to adapt faster and smarter to change, when it's appropriate to take advantage of opportunities, et cetera.

Dr. John Kotter:

The performance outlook, if you will, took me to ooh, the world is changing and those who adapt better and faster and smarter are performing better. Which took me on to leadership as a topic, too, because my doctoral thesis was actually not in business. It was following big city mayors during the very tumultuous 1960s when most cities were experiencing riots and the like. The distance between the three cities that did best and the three cities that did worst, the three mayors that did best and three mayors that did worst was huge. I mean, gargantuan. The three that did the best were much more opportunity-focused, rallied the troops, get lots and lots of people focusing on some critically smart initiatives. Changing the towns for the better and on we go from there.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Hmm. Did you have pushback from your colleagues or anyone in academia, when you decided to focus on change? Or were people innately curious about what you would discover? I'm just curious, it seems like an interesting field.

Dr. John Kotter:

Yes. I'm not sure if I ever got pushback. I'm sure some people thought this wasn't the most important topic. Whatever they were studying was the most important topic, this is human. The one place I got pushback at Harvard is when I decided to write a business fable. At that point, nobody would say, "John, you're an idiot," but you could see it. They're all going, "Oh, he's lost his mind." That fable has led to three stage plays, not Broadway, but it has impacted millions and millions and millions of people. It's been translated into 30 or 40 languages. It was a New York Times bestseller.

Dr. John Kotter:

I've had everywhere from CEOs of large corporations down to somebody on the janitorial staff of a company that I once worked for, who came up to me looking all kinds of awkward and embarrassed and everything else saying, "Excuse me, Professor Kotter." I said, "Yeah." And he said, "I found your penguin book." I said, "Really?" He says, "Makes you think." And he said, "Thank you very much," and he turned around and walked away. I must admit, that made my week.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, it's fascinating and short. You can read it in a morning or an afternoon. You've got some principles after. Patrick Lencioni, who's been on this show a few times, he would say people only read the fable parts of his book and ignore the end. I'm the guy who skips to the end to look for the principles. I hear you though. You're talking about Our Iceberg, why can't I say that, is Melting, right? Is that the book you're referring to?

Dr. John Kotter:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's your bestselling book to date.

Dr. John Kotter:

That and Leading Change have both sold a lot of copies.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, yeah. Okay, well, what I want to do and I know these are the subjects of books in themselves, but if you could give us just a quick overview of the eightfold framework that I think has held up over 25, 30 years of teaching it now. Creating a sense of urgency, guiding coalition, they're the principles I used to lead change over the years. Would love to hear you just take us through a quick overview, if that's helpful for leaders.

Dr. John Kotter:

Sure. What we found is when we could identify and convince ourselves with real data that somebody had made a major change that had resulted in much better results, it tended to start with creating a

sense of urgency among as many people as possible. That means an intellectual sense that ooh, this is the right thing to do. And an emotional sense that ooh, this is compelling. It appeals to both head and heart. And not just a small number of people, not just the executive committee. But in the most successful cases, large swaths of the organization, never 100%. I first wrote that if you could get 50% you'd established a solid basis to proceed.

Dr. John Kotter:

They then put together what I call a guiding coalition. Because it wasn't just a chunk of the hierarchy. It tended to be people from across the various units in the hierarchy and up and down levels too, so a very diverse group who had in a sense, information from all over the place. Who had connections to people all over the place, who had some people with some leadership skills, good reputations. Some management skills and who learned to work together.

Carey Nieuwhof:

In other words, you couldn't do this alone, right?

Dr. John Kotter:

Absolutely. I mean, the heroic individual leader, larger than life, highly charismatic that somehow goes out and makes a speech or two and everybody changes, doesn't happen that way. The coalition, one of the first things it does in successful cases, is it goes back to now why are we feeling this sense of urgency? Well, it's almost always associated with opportunity. If we were to capitalize on this, what would it look like? That's what vision is. Trying to articulate that so that when they talk to others, others can relate to it emotionally, intellectually. Then picking out strategic initiatives to get things rolling.

Dr. John Kotter:

Then comes communication. The point of which is to get people to buy in. Again, intellectually and emotionally. People under-communicate constantly because in running an organization in a time of steady state you don't need to communicate that much. That's part of the whole idea, is you want to eliminate the need for communication through standardization and the like. Here, more communication to more people to get them to not just nod their heads, but to really believe at intellectual and emotional levels that maybe this makes sense.

Dr. John Kotter:

Then it's a matter of letting people try things that are on that path. Encouraging volunteers, encouraging, empowering people. Resisting the impulse to want to control everything. If you're going to do anything, guide it to make sure that you get some what we call short term wins. Which are these efforts aren't just efforts, but they lead to results that you can point to as evidence that you're on to something. That builds credibility, momentum, celebrate that, pat people on the back and you get going with a virtuous cycle. Don't let urgency down, get some more people involved, some more initiatives launched, get more and better results.

Dr. John Kotter:

As this thing expands outward and more and more people from the early adopters and innovators all the way to some of the laggards get involved, ultimately you will transform something. The way you do something. Then it's just a matter of making sure that it is stabilized, which means institutionalizing it

into the structure, systems, policies. And most importantly, making sure that it becomes the new culture or a part of the new culture of just the way we do things around here. So it'll get taught to new hires, new employees, new volunteers and will maintain itself.

Dr. John Kotter:

Because it is possible to work a couple of years to achieve something that's quite remarkable, then to take your eye off of it to go on to the next thing, but because you didn't have it really stabilized in the culture, it starts to slide back toward the old ways.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's such a helpful framework. I'd love to ask you, don't want to put you on the spot, but can you think of a couple of companies that you think right now are doing this really well? That people could watch. Because I'm going to mention a church leader I wouldn't expect you to know, that I think... I don't know whether Mike has actually read your book or not, but he embodies it. Anyone from business that you would say, "Yeah, these companies," or, "this leader," or, "this group is doing a really good job"?

Dr. John Kotter:

We've worked with a company called HMS in Dallas, which basically does a number of things to help free up money that can be used for healthcare by Medicare fraud or companies doing their own thing. And they've done a marvelous job over the last three or four years of going from a frustrating position of a growing market, but they were flat in sales, to 25% growth for year after year, stock price tripling at one point. Very much because they focused on let's figure out how to figure out this transformation thing and do it because we really do think there are opportunities here that are important.

Dr. John Kotter:

Among big, well-known companies, I've been watching one for 35 years that has done a much better job than the average big company. They've gone from start up to by some measures of customer satisfaction, economic performance, employee satisfaction, growth, number one in the world. From start up to number one in the world in an established, legacy industry. It's the airline industry and the company that's done this is called Southwest. I can tell you story after story of how they managed to keep holding some things constant while changing other things as they grew and as they expanded. Doing it quickly, efficiently, with a lot of help from a lot of people. Including people buried in the organization. Very impressive.

Dr. John Kotter:

Although, one CEO, their second or third, Herb Kelleher certainly added a lot to that. He's long gone and they still can do a turn to the right, turn to the left and get their people to go along. I mean, even under the horrid conditions that the airline industry has going on right now, they have done much better than the average airline. Again, because they're managing their way through COVID. Now having said that, they've got huge challenges along with everybody else, but that's an interesting example of a big and a well known company that has done this very well.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, it's a great example too and that's to point eight in your framework. It's anchoring the change in the culture so that it survives succession, it becomes the soul or the DNA of the company. Airbnb, I don't

know that you'd agree with that. I think they've done a wonderful job in this pandemic because they were based on travel, so they went hyper local almost within six to eight weeks. It's like, "We're just going to get people out of town. We may not be able to get you across the world, we're going to get you out of town."

Carey Nieuwhof:

One church leader that comes to mind and I wouldn't expect you to know him, John. His name's Mike Todd, he leads Transformation Church in Tulsa. One of the fastest growing and largest churches in America. Young, African American leader in his early 30s. Whether he's read your framework or not, I think he embodies all of that. It's just really fun if people can follow Southwest or follow, I don't know about Airbnb, but Mike Todd. It's like, "Oh, yeah. That's these principles in operation." It's really fun to see, very opportunity minded. They had a banner year. Again, when a lot of churches and organizations were struggling, they have broken records across the board.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I'd love to talk about the dynamics of change. You've written prolifically over the years, but you wrote a book on motivating people to change. I think you hinted at it. You said you can intellectualize that this makes sense, but in creating a sense of urgency and building that guiding coalition, and getting people on board, what are some of the keys to human motivation?

Dr. John Kotter:

I mean, it's wonderful that so many of us were lucky to get a good education, but that also has some drawbacks. Because the education, they forgot everything except this part of our body. Everything down here is ignored in education. Yet, when we studied nearly 100 or 150 change efforts we reported in a book called, *The Heart of Change*, that the most successful again and again and again theme that went through there is that it was creating experiences that were emotionally compelling for people that got them to change. That that was more powerful than giving people data to change how they thought, which led them to change their behavior.

Dr. John Kotter:

That isn't to say that data-thinking-behavior link isn't enormously important in life. That's not the point. Well, I've learned a lot about consulting in the last 12 years. The consultants that show up with a Power Point slide deck that's about an inch and a half thick and go through it and it's all intellectual and then they leave, except for their bill, of course. Then you come back two years later and nothing's changed. And the Power Point deck is either missing or it's on somebody's bookshelf. I mean, it's a cliched example of just appealing to the head is not how you mobilize large groups of people to make changes and transform institutions. The emotional part is enormously important and the emotional part gets triggered with words, but it also gets triggered with experiences.

Dr. John Kotter:

I can still remember one of my senior faculty when I was a junior faculty at Harvard. I went to him once and said, "I've got this class coming up." The Harvard MBA program was designed originally to be a transformational experience for people. That's the way we thought. I said, "I'm not having as much impact on these kids as I want on the way they're thinking and the way they behave in class." I said, "I've written notes here. This is what I want to tell them." I read him a couple of minutes worth of something

that I had written down. He listened very patiently and he said, "John, your challenge I think, is not the lyrics, it's the music."

Carey Nieuwhof:

There you go.

Dr. John Kotter:

There you go.

Carey Nieuwhof:

How do you motivate people? How do you move the heart? Because you're right, leadership is communication and a lot of people here step up to a microphone who listen to this. It's easy to go with the Power Point, with the slide deck and go, "Well, for the following eight logical reasons we should move, we should do this, we should change, we should plant, we should not plant." But how do you move people's hearts?

Dr. John Kotter:

Well, it starts with some understanding of what they care about and what human beings in general care about and appealing to that. Another tragic mistake that happens inside corporations all the time of course, is the senior management communicating the latest earnings per share to the broader middle and lower parts of the organization. The senior management's very proud because the numbers are good relative to competition and down inside the organization it has no meaning.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I don't own any shares.

Dr. John Kotter:

And what, I'm going to go home and tell my kid? "Dad, how'd you do today?" "EPS was up." No, doesn't work that way. You want to be able to tell your kid that you did something that actually helped somebody. That you're proud of the work you do. That there's something about the products or services that you contribute to that actually make a positive difference in customers' lives. I mean, it's very human and it's something that people in their lives, not just in their work lives, but in their lives, care about. I heard somebody once say, "Well, that would be easy in some places, but we make ball bearings. What can you do?" And the answer is, lots of stuff. You're still dealing with human beings who are customers, you've got human beings who are employees, and by the way, you don't own all the stock, most of it's in pension programs for middle class people.

Dr. John Kotter:

So instead of talking about profitability, talk about how your stock went up and how certain institutions own big blocks of it on behalf of school teachers, on behalf of plumbers. And how proud you are that in a small way, you and your colleagues are able to contribute to their retirement plan, which God knows they deserve. Well, it's anybody, all institutions. It's not manipulative, it's being honest. As a matter of fact, when you fudge the facts, you risk getting yourself in trouble because somebody will find out and then your credibility's dead and good luck trying to influence people when your credibility is no longer there.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, those are really good points. I know something at staff meeting we always did at the church and I do now in my company, is we just tell stories of life change. Where I am right now, which is an online business, if we hear from a podcast listener, we'll often share that at staff meeting, or something came in the public inbox and it's like, "Wow! Look at the difference this made." It's connecting the dots, it's letting people know that yeah, maybe you worked on some code on the website or maybe you were just producing yet another episode, but here's the impact it had on peoples' lives. That's the kind of thing you're talking about?

Dr. John Kotter:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. I want to talk about the speed of change. Long before COVID, and we've already touched on how accelerated it's been over the last year, but you were writing a decade ago and earlier, that change just keeps accelerating and accelerating. I think you finished an article in the Harvard Business Review in 2012 saying unless you manage to respond to the pace of change, a lot of companies just aren't going to make it, leaders aren't going to make it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Can you talk about what's at stake and some of the dynamics of rapid change?

Dr. John Kotter:

Yeah. First of all, I mean, nobody thinks about it, but it's useful to realize that this trend toward more change, faster change, and more complex change is not only pronounced in my lifetime, in your lifetime, but it goes back to the switch between a hunting and gathering basically society and an agricultural society. I mean, it goes all the way through. During industrialization everything sped up and now as we move into the information age or computer age, it's speeding up again. This has just profound implications because I mean, it's not a good metaphor again. But imagine driving a car at five miles an hour versus 170 miles an hour in terms of the stakes. At five miles an hour, the probability that you could hurt yourself or somebody else is pretty low.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, that's a good point.

Dr. John Kotter:

At 170, you could go off the road, into somebody's house.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, fireballs, everybody's dead. Yeah, a lot of damage.

Dr. John Kotter:

Yeah. The stakes are huge. In our interconnected world now, more and more what I do in Sarasota or in Boston or somewhere else in New England, is being felt in places that I've never been. In Tibet, in

Swaziland, in Croatia through a complicated series of interconnections. When individuals do things, although they don't see the results of what they do, it's not in their office, it's not looking at them like I'm looking at you right now... Here we go. In the paper yesterday, it said that the Biogen conference that occurred in Boston in February, the latest estimates by people who are not trying to play games, but are really looking, is that at first they thought it affected a number; dozens of people with COVID.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay, yeah. This is a super spreader event. I remember that, yes.

Dr. John Kotter:

Right, right. A lot of them left Boston to other countries so we traced those and the numbers go up to 100s. The latest estimate is 300,000.

Carey Nieuwhof:

From one conference in Boston in February, 300,000 people got infected with COVID. Wow!

Dr. John Kotter:

That would only be possible if we have jet planes, we have this interconnected world, we have people who are moving around quickly. I mean, it wasn't that long ago, 100 years ago, the average person was born somewhere and they died there. That was it. Well, that's not the world we live in. Although we're shut down from travel temporarily to a degree, that's temporary. They're building, as you know, new supersonic commercial jets that'll get us across the US or to Europe or to Asia faster even than first generation of Concorde.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What's the implication for leaders with the rapid interconnected network world and the pace of change? How does that change the dynamic of leading change?

Dr. John Kotter:

Oh, at least a decade ago, a reporter asked me, "In the future, what kind of leadership are we going to need more of?" What he was thinking, it was a he, I remember that, is either leadership that has a more sophisticated, global sense or leadership that is more technologically sophisticated. I said, "The kind of leadership we need in the future is more." Having thought back, I thought about that and been asked that question many times since, and I keep coming back to that answer. In the book I'm writing right now, the second to the last chapter is called something like, More Leadership for More People.

Dr. John Kotter:

What leadership increasingly involves is getting other people to lead because you need... Now we're back to change. The faster the change, the more the change, the more often the change, the more people you need to have out there helping you. One person providing the leadership, even if they're extraordinary, doesn't do it. A lot of what leadership is, is getting others to lead so that you get the multiplier effect so you can actually make more happen faster and smarter and better.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That is such good advice and I think there's way too many leaders in business and in the church world, not for profits who are the sole hero model. It's like, "I'm going to do it all." It's interesting, I'll talk about this at the end of the podcast probably in a segment I do, but it's funny. I'm remembering after having read your book, we had an existing board but they were all, with all due respect, older people who had been there for a long, long time. I thought, "These are not going to be the people who create change," so I got permission to create a guiding coalition. We set up a vision and mission team and pulled from throughout the organization at each of the churches. They're the ones that we together crafted the vision. We crafted the strategy, so you are already getting ownership onboard. That's a very simple example, but you're saying basically it can't just start and end with you, to leaders. Is that fair?

Dr. John Kotter:

Correct, correct. Back to your question about stakes, I think the upside of getting a lot more people from a lot more institutions into the leadership game, even if only a small degree, versus not having that happen over the next five, 10, 15, 20 years, the stakes are big. We've got to do it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Couple of quick questions to wrap today. Thank you for being so generous with your time. A lot of leaders it's like, "Okay. Well, I got to make some change." If there's one area where you think, okay, if you're going to start the change process, start here. What would you say?

Dr. John Kotter:

I think more often than not, because of if you will, the feedback systems that go to the typical person in the leadership position. If they don't watch out it's very easy for them to receive information that suggests that their people see what they see, understand what they understand, and therefore, it's not that difficult a task really, to convince them that some change is needed. I mean, it's obvious because of we're losing money. It's obvious because on Sundays not that many seats. No, creating a real sense of urgency that there is both a problem and a real opportunity here and among lots of people is just essential.

Dr. John Kotter:

It's very easy, again, because of the information that tends to flow to leaders unless they go out of their way to maintain relationships that are open and honest with a larger group of people, to fool yourself. To say, "Well, this isn't a problem. Now, let's move on." Then they wonder why they get bogged down, why people resist. Then the question is always, why are these people unreasonably resisting? Or they come up with talking points of they're stubborn, they're stupid, they're threatened with the future. Well, maybe a little bit of all of that stuff, but you also didn't set the mood right at the beginning. Do that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's good advice. Okay, is there ever, because you've done this for many, many years in many conversations, is there ever a question about change you wish people would ask you, but nobody ever asks you?

Dr. John Kotter:

I've written something but not published anything on the subject of charisma. I suppose it does occur to me that I wish people would occasionally ask me about the importance of charisma. Because the reigning implicit theory of the connection between charisma and change is every once in a while you get a very charismatic individual who has such powerful draw on people, that they do whatever he says. Which creates changes and better results.

Dr. John Kotter:

When you study it carefully enough, you discover that more likely what it is that you've got a solid person, he or she follows the kind of steps that I write about. He or she follows the kind of principles that I talk about. That eventually starts getting results, produces change and when enough people see the unexpected good, beneficial, transformational change, they look back at that person and suddenly the person looks to them larger than life and charismatic.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That is a fascinating insight.

Dr. John Kotter:

Causality is backwards. It's not charisma leads to great change, it's great change leads to a perception of charisma.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I hope you publish that.

Dr. John Kotter:

Someday.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, Dr. John Kotter, this has been a joy. Thank you so much for being with us. If people want to learn more or obviously your books are available on Amazon, everywhere books are sold, but where is the headquarters for you these days on the internet that people can find you?

Dr. John Kotter:

Just type in John Kotter and you'll get some repeats of Welcome Back, Kotter, a TV show from a long time ago. But mostly you'll get more information about me than you need. Or go to the company's website because there's free stuff on that and some written pieces that haven't been published that we are told people find very helpful. That's Kotter International, is the name of the company. Amazon, Kotter International, or John P. Kotter at your fingertips.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Thank you so much for making the time and thanks for taking your work so seriously. It's made a huge difference in my life and I know the lives of millions of other people. Now a few more as a result of today. Thanks so much, Dr. Kotter.

Dr. John Kotter:

No, thank you for doing things like this. The world needs more.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, you just heard from the leading expert on change in the world. It was such a thrill as you could probably tell, to catch up with Dr. Kotter and have a conversation with him.

Carey Nieuwhof:

We have lots of great episodes coming up for you. Still to come, Micheal Arrieta, he's got a fascinating story out of Silicon Valley, now Atlanta, on start up as a young entrepreneur. Cal Newport, Adam Grant, oh, my goodness. Talk about a powerful conversation. Steve Cuss, Annie F. Downs, Amy Edmondson, Simon Sinek, Ian Morgan Cron. All of them, Rick Warren, coming back and more. I didn't even mention John Maxwell.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's what you get when you subscribe for free. So if you haven't done that yet, please do so. Thank you to everybody who's leaving ratings and reviews, we read them all. We really appreciate it, really thankful for you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Hey, we do have a new episode coming up in just a few days and that is with Dee Ann Turner, she's back on the podcast. She served for decades as Chic-fil-A's Vice President of Talent and she's been responsible for the hiring of tens of thousands of people. She returns to the podcast with pro tips on how to crush your career. Here's an excerpt.

Dee Ann Turner:

Well, for me, I'm looking for people willing to go above and beyond because I worked in an organization that had a principle; make second mile service second nature. To me, that's an extra above and beyond these days to get a handwritten note. Because one in 10 do it, it really makes you stand out. Somebody might not necessarily keep the note, but they certainly remember that you wrote it and it makes an impression. Not only that, two days later, if they're still evaluating candidates, they get a handwritten note from you and you're not lost in the thousands of emails they have, you can really stand out as different. By the way, that just not for interviewing, but send handwritten notes for any occasion these days and you get noticed.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That is next time and we're going to have a fascinating conversation about that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Now it's time for What I'm Thinking About. I'm thinking about what not to say when leading change. This is brought to you by Pro Media Fire. You can book your free digital strategy session today by going to promediafire.com/churchgrowth. And by BELAY. You can text Carey, C-A-R-E-Y, to 31996 and get your free download of BELAY's delegation planner to start reclaiming your free time today.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What should you say when you're leading change? I've led a lot of change. I often think particularly 30 years into my leadership, whatever. Yeah, I guess, yeah between law and all that, it's about 30 years. It's like, "You know what? The only thing that's consistent is change." This has been a year of rapid change. We talked about it a little bit in the podcast. But even off mic John Kotter and I were talking about just the incredible rapid pace of change he's seen, the acceleration and you have to lead in the middle of that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So here's some things that I have learned about what not to say when you're leading change. This is interesting because when you hear the Adam Grant interview that's coming up on the podcast, you're going to go like, "Oh, yeah. This borne out by science," but anyway. Here's one thing I've heard leaders say, don't do this. "These changes are great. I can't understand why you don't like them." No, that lacks empathy and often when we lead change, we come out of the gate saying, "Hey, I got the bulletproof plan. Everybody listen and follow me." This actually has the opposite effect. So when you come out and you have very little empathy for opponents, like, "I don't understand why you don't like them," that doesn't go well.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Here's a second thing particularly for Christian leaders. Never ever get up and say, "God told me this is what we should do." I really struggle with people who speak for God and listen, I'm a preacher, okay? So I do speak for God. It's one thing to say, "Jesus came and died and rose again." That's one thing, you can say that. But when you're like, "Hey, we should build this building," or, "You need to give me money," or whatever. Mm, no, no, I don't think you can say, "God gave me a plan." Even if you believe God gave you a plan, you should be really careful. Here's an alternative. Say, "Our team has looked at this, prayerfully considered the options, we believe this is the best move we can make at this time for these reasons." I think that actually gives you credibility and if you use God's name for your personal plans, you lose credibility. At least you do in my book.

Carey Nieuwhof:

How about this one? "We got this all figured out, trust me." Mm, people who say "trust me," often aren't trustable. So don't try to be the know it all person, it just actually reduces confidence that you've got this figured out.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Here's another thing too, sometimes I've heard leaders say, "Look, what happened in the past is completely irrelevant, focus on the future." I am very tempted to do this, but what you have to realize is people have memories of the past. They don't have a clear picture of the future. You've got to honor the past without living it. Maybe say like, "Hey, we've had some great moments, some great seasons in the past, and we want to ensure we have many more in the future. That's what I'm hoping this change will accomplish." That can be good to honor your predecessors.

Carey Nieuwhof:

How about this? "Everybody needs to get onboard right now." That's just not going to happen, okay? It's not going to happen. People are not going to get onboard right now. You wish they would, but you might say something like, "I realize this is going to stretch all of us. I appreciate those of you who are willing to give this a chance, even though you're not sure. We really value that."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Another one, and this is a temptation for me. "I know people are leaving. Who cares?" That's how I feel sometimes because that's just a mask for pain. Don't gloat, don't pretend it doesn't matter. It does matter. Now there are times people are going to leave your church and there are times when people should leave your church, but remember, these are relationships and people feel it. Rather than being upset or mad at them, just say, "Yes, it is sad that people are leaving, that we are losing customers," or whatever your case is. "But I think what we need to remember is that they'll have another place to go to and I'm excited about creating space for people who haven't yet been to a church or an organization like ours. I'm excited you want to create space for them too." That's something you could say.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Final thing, don't say your plan is bulletproof. It's not bulletproof. It might fail, you don't know. Instead say something like, "I agree. I don't know for sure if this is going to work out, but it's helped a lot of other people and maybe nobody's really tried this before but I believe it's our next best step. So we're going to try it. And after we've given it our best, we'll evaluate it. Thanks for the freedom to try new things." Way better than, "Hey, this is bulletproof." As soon as you tell me it's bulletproof, I don't believe you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Anyway, I hope that helps you. Those are things that I've learned not to say when leading change. John Kotter had some amazing things to say. We do have show notes for you. You can find them at careynieuwhof.com/episode400. Yeah, they're there and we're back next time with a fresh episode. Got so much good stuff for you this year. Thank you so much for listening, thanks for leading. And I hope our time together today helps 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.