

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 406 of the podcast. Carey here, and I hope our time together today helps you lead like never before. I'm so excited to have Steve Cuss back on the podcast. When he came on for the first time about a year ago, that episode absolutely blew up and as we'll talk about, it changed his life a little bit too. A lot of you have consulted Steve, and he's doing a lot more consultation on managing leadership anxiety. So he's back and today's episode is brought to you by Pro Media Fire.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You can get help with your social media strategy and get 10% off for life at promediafire.com/carey, and by Convoy of Hope, you can bring hope to the hurting and the hungry by texting COH to 68828, or just go to convoyofhope.org to donate and everything you use there gets multiplied. So glad to have Steve back and hey, I just noticed something you may have known about for years. I think this used to require some kind of complicated setup and then Silicon Valley took care of it, but if you have a smart device in your home, if you have an Alexa, or if you have a Google Assistant, here's what you can do. You can just say, "Alexa, play the Carey Nieuwhof Leadership Podcast." And she will. Or you can say, "Hey, Google, play the Carrie Nieuwhof Leadership Podcast."

Carey Nieuwhof:

And it will usually pick up right where you left off on your device. So if you're chopping carrots in the kitchen one day, or just sitting around, you got a smart device nearby, I try it. And it's another way to catch up. I hear a lot of leaders who tell me on a regular basis, "Hey, I just found the show. I'm going back through the entire archive. That's like a lot of hours. So if that helps you at all to keep listening to this or to another one of your favorite podcasts, just a little tip for you. So, anyway, with that said, let's talk about today's episode. Steve is the author of *Managing Leadership Anxiety: Yours and Theirs*, and the founder of capablelife.me, which helps people function as a calm, aware, present human in the workplace and home place.

Carey Nieuwhof:

He has also served as the lead Pastor of Discovery Christian Church in Broomfield, and is a partner with Compassion International Leadership Network and Missio Alliance. So speaking of managing things, do you need help managing your social media in 2021? Pro MediaFire can help you save time or reach more people and get a complete team working for you. It's a simple process. So their social media team meets with you to discover your brand, your story, and who you want to reach. And then they create a custom strategy, social media brand style guide, and then they do the work. Social media plans include social media, branded storytelling, a post creation from graphics to videos, writing post captions, posting, and managing the accounts, and then digital marketing to expand your reach.

Carey Nieuwhof:

The results you save time, and you grow online while your social team does all the work. As a listener of this podcast, you receive 10% off for life by going to promediafire.com/carey and Convoy of Hope has been a great partner of this podcast as well and they are doing great work. So a lot of you have your own kind of initiatives, but the cool thing about Convoy of Hope is they have buying power that even most mega churches don't. They take a dollar and stretch it into six because they can magnify their work with companies like Walmart, The Home Depot, Collagen, Nestle Water, Bass Pro Shops. Speaking of water, they were in Texas recently with the devastatingly cold temperatures and snow storms, and they got water and so much more, to people who needed it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You can give to the continued work in Texas. Last year, they delivered 150 million meals to those affected by COVID-19 all in partnership with the local church. And so wherever there's a problem they're there. And what they try to do is empower others to live with greater independence and freedom, to live free from poverty, disease and hunger. So you can bring hope to the hurting and hungry by texting COH to 68828, that COH to 68828 or just go to convoyofhope.org to donate or to partner with them as a church or organization. So I'm excited to jump into this conversation with Steve Cuss. And it was a conversation. You remember, if you listened to the Adam Grant episode, I said, usually I try to do an interview and shut up and let the guest talk, 95% of the time.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But the Adam Grant interview turned into a conversation like at dinner and this one kind of did too, okay. I think either the guests sometimes does that or sometimes I just get so comfortable that we end up in a dialogue and I think that's what happened with Steve, but I hope you find it enjoyable. I sure did. So let's manage our leadership anxiety. Here's my conversation with Steve Cuss. Steve, welcome back to the podcast. It's great to have you.

Steve Cuss:

Great to be with you, Carey, I had so much fun last time. So I'm just really excited to be with you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, you helped a lot of leaders, myself included, and here we are a year into the pandemic. And the world is not back to normal and you have spent a lot of time, particularly over the last year, helping people manage leadership anxiety, and the anxiety that global crisis presents. So I kind of want to do a recap. now that we're a year in, what would you say the top symptoms you were dealing with in leaders have been over the last year? Just so people get some framework and go, "Oh yeah, that's exactly what I was dealing with."

Steve Cuss:

Oh man. I'll talk to a ton of leaders or I should say probably listened to a ton of leaders and there are some common themes. So, one of them is ambiguity. As you know Carey, one of the things I do is study the dynamics of anxiety because it's such a big word that if we can break it down into the things that cause anxiety, it can help us. Ambiguity will always make you anxious. Also known as, any time you don't know what to do. Anytime you're in a situation where you don't know what to do, I don't care how you're wired. Like I'm a pretty confident looking guy, but put me in a situation where I don't know what to do, and I'm a leader I'm supposed to do something, I'm going to be anxious.

Steve Cuss:

So ambiguity has been huge. I think the trifecta of racial injustice, COVID and at least in the United States, political strife, there's three. For any faith leader, particularly, but even business leader. If you have a diverse team or congregation or business, you're making decisions that people are seeing through those lenses and so they're projecting onto you, their baggage, and that's going to make you anxious. Anytime you feel misunderstood, or as a leader, you don't feel seen. It's going to generate anxiety. And then the criticism would be the third. I've listened to so many leaders who just can't take one more critic.

Steve Cuss:

And I think this is unique to churches. There's something, I think unique in the people who attend a church for a while, think that means they know how to lead a church. And so they're just very free to tell the leader what the leader should do and yeah, those would be three. Man, a lot of leaders running on empty right now.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So I want to double-click on a couple of those, but let's go to criticism, because that is a big deal. And I've talked to some leaders who in normal times, very stable, they handle it, they lead a lot of stuff and they're used to their share of critics, but I've gotten some emergency texts from friends who are like, "if one more person criticizes me like, dude, I don't know whether I can do this anymore, this is nuts." And particularly, I don't know whether you saw this or not, and this is not a political statement, but the partisanship around November 2020, that seemed to leak out all over the place.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And that's when I probably saw that peak. And did you see that as well? Like I don't want to know it. I don't want to say it's better yet because I think people love being critical, but was there like an epoch to that around the elections?

Steve Cuss:

Yes, I agree with you. I think there was, and I actually think understanding anxiety explains it because anxiety spreads in any group and the more anxious the leader is, the more anxious the group is. And so the general rule that anxiety is the most anxious person in any room has the most power in that room.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And people have seen that, like if you're in a small group and there's always that same person that's always needy and down, you can see everybody in that small group kind of suddenly putting all their energy to that needy person.

Steve Cuss:

Or some of us tune them out maybe. Anyway, never mind. That's unhealthy.

Steve Cuss:

Did you just say that out loud? I think you did.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I think I didn't say that out loud.

Steve Cuss:

Again, if we dismiss political policy and just look at personality, the US President was, most of the time the most anxious person in any room, and his anxiety spread to not just his followers, but everybody. And again, I wish he had a different political affiliation, so people wouldn't hear that as a political comment.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right. They wouldn't hear it as a Democrat Republican thing, but they would just say, "there here was someone who was very anxious in the white house."

Steve Cuss:

Extremely anxious. One of the most anxious people ever.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay, that's a very different take on Donald Trump than I've ever heard. So let's go there. What made you-

Steve Cuss:

Got you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Let's talk about what makes you diagnose that from afar as anxiety.

Steve Cuss:

So you can watch anxiety spread and now you can watch it dissipating. Like it's not that our problems have gone away, it's that people have calmed down about the problems that exist. And when president Trump would speak, he would escalate the problem to an anxious and reactive state. So what you're looking for in anxiety is reactivity.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right.

Steve Cuss:

And we all generally know after the fact when we were reactive, why I just try to train people is to overtime learn how to notice it in the moment and then preemptively. So every one of us would know how to push the president's buttons to get a reaction out of him.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right.

Steve Cuss:

And he doesn't manage his reactivity. You might even say he actually wields it or inflicts it on people. And so if we take it away from politics, because I know that is such a red flag for people.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. There's already angry comments coming in.

Steve Cuss:

And I'll just forward them to you. But, but most of us have worked for a boss like this. Most of us are related to somebody like this. So what I do, I train people to notice anxiety in a group and pay attention, not to what people are saying, but the way people are reacting to each other. And that's kind of how you can lead us, like a leading in a whole other gear.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So that's really interesting. I can look back on my own leadership to be self-reflective and self-critical and say there were times where maybe things weren't going well at home, or I was really frustrated and I show up to a staff meeting and you're saying that anxiety spreads.

Steve Cuss:

Yes. And unfortunately the higher up you are in the power, the more your anxiety impacts your group. And that's why it's so important for key leaders of organizations to be the one that worked most on their own anxiety. So step number one, Carey is just, how do you know when you're anxious? I mean, I've asked now thousands of leaders, that question. It's interesting how few of us actually know when we're anxious and what makes us anxious until we have time to reflect and ask ourselves, or sometimes we have to ask someone that loves us. I'm coaching somebody right now. He's a business leader of a multi-million dollar business. And he reached out because he's dealing with some anxiety pressure. And we got to the bottom of, what's generating your anxiety and he wasn't sure.

Steve Cuss:

And I was listening to him and I said, "I want you to go home to your wife and just float the idea that maybe it's a control thing for you, that if you're not in control..." Control is not a trigger for me, for me it's approval. I want people to like me or performance. I want to accomplish.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right.

Steve Cuss:

For him it was control. So we met a week later. I'm like, "How did it go?" And he's like, "yeah. The worst thing about it was my wife was like, 'Well, duh.' Like she's known for years what he didn't know." And so for a leader to be able to know what makes them anxious now you have a power tool to start to overcome it. But yeah, Carey, I think we've all done that we've all walked away saying, "Oh man, my poor team has carried the weight of my anxiety because I didn't manage it."

Carey Nieuwhof:

I want to go back to that because I think there are times... What really surprised me, and again, please do not hear this as partisan or criticism of the former president or whatever. In four years of observing

president Trump, I never thought of it as anxiety. So that's really interesting. And then you go there and say, "Oh no, he was anxious." What makes you diagnose that? Because now it's making me think, "what do I think is an anxiety that is actually anxiety in me?" So what makes you from where you sit, observing what you observe say, "no, that would appear to me to be an anxious leader."

Steve Cuss:

That's fantastic question because that reactivity, a lot of people when they hear anxiety, they think worry and fear. And so for example, since we are talking openly about the president, I would imagine that he would say, "I'm not worried about anything. I'm not afraid of anything." And therefore he would say, "I'm not an anxious person," but if instead, if you look at chronic anxiety, that's the anxiety ideal. Chronic anxiety is always generated after you don't get what you want or more keenly. You don't get what you believe you actually need that you actually don't need. And so, for example, the president would never distinguish between picking a fight with a world leader like North Korea or a fairly unpopular celebrity.

Steve Cuss:

He would pick an equal fight where he would demolish both, that's because he's in the group of reactivity because he needs to have the last word, he needs to be seen as a winner and so any time he's not... He doesn't look strong. He's now in the grip of anxiety. That's what I would say. Now, obviously I'm moving into territory. I'm not a psychologist.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Maybe that's the end of that conversation and I appreciate you going there, but with the clients you've worked with, just to be clear, you haven't worked with The White House.

Steve Cuss:

Yeah. Not yet.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And I'm not one given to, Hey, I don't know that person, so I'm going to opine on them. So let's leave that, okay? It was just a new thought to me. But let's talk about leaders you've worked with, executives, senior pastors, et cetera. How would anxiety manifest itself? Like for this guy it was control is underneath it, right? And that would probably be my issue too. What would that look like in a meeting? Like, I can tell you if I'm coming in agitated, that would be like, "Oh yeah, he's anxious." So if I'm coming in, I'll give you an example. For me, and you can be my psychotherapist here, I would say when I was unhealthy, I would walk into a meeting and make everybody work harder.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I was like, "Okay, this is super urgent. We got to get this thing done." I'm not, subtext, "I'm not happy with the progress we're making, so Steve get to work. Hey, get to work, everybody double down, we got to do better than this." And that would be like an expression to my anxiety. Am I right in that?

Steve Cuss:

Yep.

Steve Cuss:

Anxiety can look really sophisticated. Sometimes it can look like taking charge, proactivity. So I'll confess since I've been accusing here, I'll start confessing my own sins. When I was a hospital chaplain, where as you know I learned some of these early lessons. Up until that point, I'd always been rewarded or affirmed for my proactivity and my take-charge nature. In youth group and when I was a teenager and stuff, oh man, Steve's that guy that if no one knows what to do, he'll step in. So therefore I'm saying, "Oh wow, what a gift look at this?" Well, here I am in a room with say five screaming people or people who are unhinged in shock with grief.

Steve Cuss:

I don't know what to do and so I take charge. What anxiety does, is it stops you from being present and aware to what's actually going on. You're no longer able to see what's actually going on. You're now infected by this kind of false lens. And so the false lens eyes infected by is, I must do something. Whereas really with people in grief, in shock, what you really do is you set your stopwatch for about three hours and you work on your own need to do something and you die to it and you say, "I must be present," which is a lot of work. I don't mind saying you watch your average hospital chaplain. If they're not doing anything they are exhausted after sitting fully present to what's going on.

Steve Cuss:

So in a meeting then what that looks like is if I don't know what to do, or I have a need to have the last word in every meeting, because I'm the Lead Pastor. That is sometimes a gift and it's sometimes an anxious response. So what you gave me Carey is not enough for me to go on. I mean, I've already kind of crossed the line with our beloved former president. But in your case, it is this idea of your need for efficiency has maybe flooded your ability to see what's going on with those people or what's really needed that only you... I'll say it...

Carey Nieuwhof:

No. That makes sense, because I would approach it differently now on a good day and it would be like, rather than you are the problem, it's like we have a problem. Anyone have any ideas on how to solve this? Any thoughts here? Okay, if we want to make progress in this area, what does that look like? So it's more like presenting the problem rather than just a quick solution that wasn't helpful.

Steve Cuss:

One of my key leaders came to me several years ago now and he says, "Hey, maybe you're not aware of this, but every time you want us to do something, it's always like you suddenly came up with it. It doesn't feel like there's any context to it and then you need it done right away." And I was like, "really?" And we'd worked together several years at this point. And I had to say to him, "I had no idea that I do that." And of course, tell me more. Now what he was describing for me was an anxious response and what was going on in me is our church was growing rapidly. I was getting all kinds of things coming at me. And I was just trying to delegate as quick as I could but his experience of that was this insane. Everything for me is instantly urgent.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right?

Steve Cuss:

So now I have insight and now I can lower my reactivity. Be more present to him and say, "Hey, I want you to know I'm feeling so much pressure with everything coming at me. I need you to just take this off my plate." That's a different conversation than me just doing it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It kind of signals self-awareness and then it opens it up for dialogue. Let's go back to that scenario. You said in a small group or could be a staff meeting or whatever, but a lot of us who lead are in charge and so we have our own anxiety, but sometimes you have that one staff member, that one team member who's like crisis a day, crisis a week, or they're always anxious, so we're not going to hit the numbers. So whatever it happens to be, what is an unhelpful response to that person? And what is a more helpful response to that most anxious member of the group?

Steve Cuss:

Yeah, and sometimes it can look really sophisticated. Sometimes the anxious person is quiet and the few times they speak up, they own all the power in the room because they don't speak up much. So what I train leaders to do, let's say it is a key leader. What you have to do is you have to pay as much attention to what's going on between people as you do to the agenda of the meeting. And that's hard for driven leaders. We want to kind of make progress, but this is a muscle we all have. It's just a bit flabby in some of us. It's what I call the process muscle. Nevermind the content, what people are saying, pay attention to what's going on in the room and you can see energy and anxiety spreading in any group.

Steve Cuss:

And so if you can notice the way somebody's comment impacts another person or the whole group. Now you have this power tool and the simplest thing to do is to name it. If you can name it in a way that you're not being reactive. So like, if you're really angry, you'd normally name it at the next meeting. You take the week to calm down and then you say, "Hey, before we start, I want to go back to what happened here, because you said this and you said this, and I noticed the mood of the room changed. Did anyone else feel that?" Now everyone felt it. But as the key leader naming, it gives everyone permission to talk about it. My experience is more often than not the person that stepped on it is grateful to do some repair.

Steve Cuss:

That's been my overwhelming experience since the person who said something, they felt it too, but they don't know what to do with it. So as the leader, when you're saying let's debrief what happened. That person's like, "Oh look, I'm really sorry. I feel like Jane, I feel like I said something that shut you down that was not my intention," simply naming the dynamic. So that's really the rule. And then it gets into trouble if you name the dynamic while you're heated, as the leader that makes it worse.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So better quiet and revisit it when you're a little more rational. Let's say we're in that group situation. You're running the meeting. I'm the anxious person. Every time you have an idea, it's like, "Steve, I don't know if that's going to work," or "last time we tried that, I don't know, man. I'm totally overwhelmed, I can't do this." I'm not just expressing my thoughts, but I'm taking the whole group. I'm basically shutting it down. What do you say to me in that moment if you're level-headed?

Steve Cuss:

Yeah. So you're now the yeah-but guy, right?

Carey Nieuwhof:

I am so overwhelmed right now and slammed. I can't even think about this. Don't you think we have enough to do? I got a million reasons why your idea is a bad idea.

Steve Cuss:

What about that? So I would typically let it go. A couple of meetings I'd watch it. So what I'm training leaders to do is pay attention to recurring predictable patterns in any group that you lead. And you can practice this with your family. It's fun to watch your kids, but the way you know a group is catching everyone's anxiety is when the same people are taking on the same characters. So in any staff meeting, it's always the same person as the last word. It's always the same person that no matter what people shared, he or she get to override the decision, right? It's always the same people that never speak up in the meeting then they had their own meeting after the meeting.

Steve Cuss:

So I'm training leaders to pay attention to that first. Okay, Hey, run a few meetings and as you're doing the agenda, have ne eye on the agenda and have one eye on recurring predictable patterns. Now, as I just said that right now, Carey, most of your listeners, they can already map it out. Like you probably can too. And so once you've figured out the recurring predictable pattern, it kind of spoils you because now you can not see it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right.

Steve Cuss:

Now you have this power tool. My next move is to bring that person into a one-on-one and say, "I've noticed this recurring predictable pattern." Now the ideal way to do it is to not accuse, but to confess. So I've often, especially when I was a young leader and I was still growing in my leadership. What would happen is I had noticed these patterns, but sometimes I'd let someone get away with it for so long. I felt like unethical to change it on them. So when I meet with them, I would confess. I'd say, "Look, there's two problems. The first problem is the way you're showing up. The second problem is I'm letting you get away with it. And the reason I'll be letting you get away with it is I didn't know what to do. I really like you. I don't want to shame you in a meeting. I don't want to call you out.

Steve Cuss:

So what's been happening is I go home and I stew. I have an anger fantasy about you. I'm frustrated. Then I walked myself down and I'm fine then you do it again and I do it again. So, Hey, I'm not accusing you of anything. I'm telling you my part of the problem. Now, can we talk about your part of the problem? What do you and I need to do so that you're not the yeah-but guys, because everybody in that room knows you're the yeah-but guys.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow.

Steve Cuss:

Now what might happen? If you can do this from a humble posture. And I genuinely mean, like you're actually coming alongside. You're not like this top-down, "Hey, you got to knock it off." They may actually help you. They may say, "listen, here's what you don't know. You don't know that you wear all of us out with all your ideas that never go anywhere." I might be the yeah-but guys. You're the idea guy that you don't care about. So like I had a friend of my life and his wife says, he has ideas that he wouldn't care about tomorrow. That's actually describes him. And she's learned that the way I love him as I sit through his ideas, knowing that tomorrow he wouldn't care about them.

Steve Cuss:

Now you might be that kind of leader and the yeah-but guy is feeling a balance, like a seesaw or a teeter-totter.

PART 1 OF 4 ENDS [00:26:04]

Steve Cuss:

That's where anxiety management really gets powerful, is when you stop seeing the problem inside someone and you start seeing it as between you and that person. What is the recurring dynamic between you and me? On the one hand, the the yeah-but guy might need to change. On the other hand, he might be saying, "The more ideas you generate that we don't do, the more I feel my job is to bring you down to earth." Well, now you have an ally. Now you have somebody where the two of you, can we agree together that we're going to both be different?

Steve Cuss:

I've been the idea guy. I've been the guy in meetings where people are like, "Steve, do you have 100 ideas? Seventy of them are bad and then 10 of them are amazing and we just have to sit through the many to get to the few." I've now often said that to people, "Hey, the only way I know how to get to a good idea is to get through a whole bunch of bad ideas. I'll try to help you know when we're going to take traction or not." I don't know if that helps-

Carey Nieuwhof:

So managing leadership anxiety is related to self-awareness and being able to process it.

Steve Cuss:

Yeah, all you're doing is naming what people feel. People pay attention to content, what's being said, but they react emotionally to process, the way we relate. So if you're naming process, you're giving people an incredible tool.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. Let's go back to because a lot of the people who listen to the show are decision makers. They are in that seat, whether it's with their team or in the senior seat in the organization. But they're definitely that person in the room who it's always hard to speak the truth to power. Really hard to have that conversation. Any other tips for becoming aware that you're anxious and you're bringing that anxiety into a meeting or into a dynamic? Just your team dynamics. It could be in your preaching, it could be in

your vision casting. It could be in your day to day, your one-on-ones. How do you know that you might be exuding anxiety?

Steve Cuss:

Yeah. There's three simple ways to know you're anxious. The first one's in your body. You can start noticing when your mind spins, when your heart's racing or when your body's tightening. And tightening is either clenched shoulders, muscular, or stomach and nauseous. I would say to every listener right now, simply you can name out loud. Maybe you're driving in a car and you can just say, "The way I know I'm anxious is my mind spins. The way I know I'm anxious is my heart races." That's a simple way. Some people will be listening, they'll be like, "Well, it's all of them." And then a few people will be like, "Well, it's none of them." If your listeners are saying, "Well, it's none of those," then ask someone who loves you and they'll tell you. But your body. Your body can tell you when you're anxious. For me, it's a spinning mind. I try to worry my way to peace and it never works.

Carey Nieuwhof:

No, it never works.

Steve Cuss:

It's never worked and it's like drinking salt water, but I believe that it works. What happens is anxiety grabs you and then it drags you along like a moth to a flame. Once you know in your body, you can actually intervene earlier. That's the first.

Steve Cuss:

The second one is to simply name something that you need that you don't really need. Affirmation, control, having the last word, doing it perfectly. Just naming that, just that confession, it gives you power over it. The next time I go into a meeting, I know that I need to be respected. So when I feel disrespected, I get anxious. That's step two.

Steve Cuss:

Step three, this is my favorite. Chronic anxiety and knowing God's with you don't coexist. So the sure fire way that you know you're anxious is you've forgotten that God is with you. What that looks like is a feeling of it's all on my shoulders. Before we hit the microphone, Carey, I was telling you that I've been really anxious the last couple of weeks. So I'm not the anxiety guru like Yoda, like I'm above everybody else. I get anxious every day. But I was probably in a two to three week spiral because I'm in a project right now with unending work. There's just no end to it and I'm putting myself under all this pressure.

Steve Cuss:

The way I know I'm anxious, is I forget that I'm actually in God's hands. What I do, is I've learned to notice when I've forgotten that God's with me. I know that's nuanced, God's always with us. It's not that God leaves, it's that we no longer notice. Because the space where we notice God, that's the space that chronic anxiety fills. John says perfect love casts out fear. I just want your listeners just to picture perfect love displaces anxiety. It's amazing. You cannot be anxious and loved at the same time. So if you are experiencing love, and by the way, you also can't be laughing and anxious. Laughter also displaces anxiety.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, you're right.

Steve Cuss:

Yeah, it does, right? It just-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, it totally does.

Steve Cuss:

Yeah. And that's another tool leaders can use if you step on a landmine in a meeting, you say something stupid. You can just make a joke about yourself and everyone feels better and you feel better. That's because laughter dissipates anxiety. When I was a chaplain, this is when I really first learned this. I would do these marathon, 28 hour, overnight shifts. Maybe one day I've helped four people die and I'm in the break room, it's 1:00 a.m. I'm watching Seinfeld because I need a numb out. I'm eating my little chuck wagon steak and the beeper goes off and it's death number five. I just feel like I can't do it anymore. Like "Ah!" Then what happens because I'm not getting what I think I need, which is Seinfeld and chuck wagon steak, that's been taken from me, now I'm angry. That's how I know I'm anxious because I'm angry. And I'm angry at the person for dying and inconveniencing my Seinfeld episode.

Steve Cuss:

Now, if I'm not aware of that, Carey, what'll happen is I'll walk into that room and I'll manipulate the widower. I'm saying to myself, "I can listen to him for eight minutes as he grieves," and because I'm a person of power as a chaplain, I can say, "Hey, let me just share Philippians and can I pray for you?"

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, that's always the closer, right? Can I pray for you? That's how you get out of meetings.

Steve Cuss:

It's code for "I've had enough." I'm not actually praying for him. I'm trying to get back to Seinfeld. Now that's really dark, but every one of us do it or have done it. However, I get the beep, death number five, I'm angry. If I'm able to say, "Okay, here's what's going on is I'm in the grip of anxiety right now," and then I just pause for a minute. Okay, God, actually what's true is you'll with me and you can carry me.

Steve Cuss:

But then where I really relax, Carey, and this is what I do all the time now. Is I remember God's not only with me, God is already at work in the room that I'm about to enter. I'm about to enter an anxious elder meeting. In fact, I've got one tonight. And as I walk into that elder meeting, I'm saying, "God, you are already in that room at work. It's not all on me. I don't have to have the answer. All I have to do is walk in and enjoy your presence as we have this difficult or wonderful meeting."

Steve Cuss:

Recently here's where I've learned this, Carey, is with church planters in Denver of all places. We're one of the most unchurched counties in America so we attract church planters like blood to sharks. I am a

leader of a former young church plant and all these church plants come and go. Once in a while, I'll get a mailer in my mailbox, and since we've been doing generalizations today, it's often from Texas. It's a Texas pastor coming to the front range of Colorado and the mailer in the mailbox says, "Coming soon, a church." And the tagline is, "bringing God to the front range of Colorado." That's what they say. We're bringing God to the front range. I look at that and I think to myself, "You jerk! First of all, Philip Yancey moved to Colorado in the 1990s. Can't we agree that God's been in Colorado, at least as long Philip Yancey?"

Carey Nieuwhof:

At least since early '90s, yeah.

Steve Cuss:

At least as the early '90s. But what they believe is that they are bringing God with them. But there's way better news, that really relaxes us, is God's already at work. So whatever meeting your listeners are anxious about, just the recognition God's with me, but God's also ahead of me. That'd probably be my most powerful tool.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It is amazing how you forget. I mean, I'm pretty anchored in my quiet time, but I was telling you about an interview I had done earlier today that really moved me. I literally dropped to my knees and part of that was I forgot God had more invested in it than I did. It was a good drop to my knees, but I just forgot. It's like, "Oh yeah, you knew this. I didn't know it, but you knew it."

Steve Cuss:

I like that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What a calm that is, when you can figure that out. The last year has been crazy and you've been dealing with a growing church and also the whole managing leadership anxiety thing that you do has just really taken off. So you're dealing with rapid growth, uncertainty, global pandemic, all the crises that we've been navigating. What have been some good practices for you over the last year to manage your anxiety in the midst of all that?

Steve Cuss:

Yeah. Oh, great question. Last time I was on the show, I don't expect people to remember, but we did talk about this thing called a life giving list. It's the-

Carey Nieuwhof:

I downloaded it man, and shared it with friends, yeah.

Steve Cuss:

It's the simplest idea and for those who haven't heard of it, it's just a list of the people and the places and the activities in your life that connect you to God or make you feel alive. And you just shared a really beautiful one. Just taking those few moments between interviews to have an encounter with God. On my own podcast I ask every guest, and when you came on, you were gracious enough to answer the

question. When in your life do you feel most fully loved? I love when people answer it. I got fascinated by can I come up with 90 answers? So right now my life giving list has 88 items on it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, man.

Steve Cuss:

I actually run an online community called Capable Life and I'm about to launch a channel where everybody shares five things off their life giving list, because what I've learned is we all adopt each other's. I was coaching a group of pastors and we were doing life giving lists. I said, "Okay, everyone go around and tell us one life giving thing that you added to your list this week." One of the pastors, he said the most remarkable thing. He said, "This is the first week that I've noticed that the first time I see my kids every morning is a gift from God." As soon as I heard it, I'm like, "Well, now I'm adding that to my list." This morning, I've got two teenagers in the house, one at college, I see both of my teenagers and it's not just another morning when I see my teens. Now it's like, "God, thank you that you gave me these incredible kids that I enjoy." And the first moment of every day is now a gift from God.

Steve Cuss:

I was awake at 4:00 a.m. this morning, I'd slept too well and woke up wide awake. Not to be too graphic, Carey, but I just reached over to my wife's leg and just spent time saying, "God, the physical touch of my wife," and this poor woman's asleep. But this may sound crazy to some people, but touching my wife on the leg is on my life giving list and it's a different item than going out on a date. So I'm very specific and as you might imagine, quite graphic on my life giving list. I definitely dug deeper into that this year. I made the decision as an Enneagram three to be less efficient and less productive because I knew that I was going to be.

Steve Cuss:

I've now become a stay-at-home dad. My wife, her business has picked up and she's out of the house a lot and my daughter has picked up, we think a stalker in the neighborhood. So I'm home a lot just for her to be safe.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh wow.

Steve Cuss:

Yeah and I don't think it'll be longterm, we're working through it, but our home is not a good place for me to write a sermon. I'm less efficient at home, but I'm more forgiving of myself. So those life-giving activities have been huge. Then the other thing I have really found helpful is to stop pretending I know what to do in unprecedented leadership decisions. Every step of the way with our church, when we send a video update, when we're navigating everything, we just tell our church, "Listen, this might be the wrong call. We've put a lot of thought, a lot of research, we've listened to a lot of leaders, but here's the call we're making. And we just want you to know, we might change our mind. Things might shift and you might feel a little jerked around and you might even say, 'Ah, I told you so,' and you might be right."

Steve Cuss:

Rather than trying to present a bold front that we actually know what we're doing because I've just found so many leaders believe the lie that they should know how to lead through ambiguity when they've never had to do it before. That'd be a couple of things.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Those are really good. I'll add one little hack to the life giving list. We were talking about it before we started recording. But my wife and I being in and out of lockdown, mostly in, over the last year, just with our place North of Toronto is we haven't seen people in five weeks. So we started creating fake date nights. We always have one Friday, but Wednesday is fake night date night. And we call it that because it's not the real date night, but we light the candles, make a special meal, hang out. It's a nice little break in the clouds in the middle of the week.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Almost every leader I've talked to, from the people who lead the largest churches, largest companies, to yeah, it's without exception, the tiniest startups are like, "I've never worked harder in my life." I've heard that over and over again over the last year. One of the challenges, Steve, is a lot of us are working from home. We're all doing the work that's never done. Your sermon's never finished. The company's never perform well enough. Your team is never fully developed. Any thoughts on the boundaries because it seems like when there was an office to go to, it's easier. It's like, "Okay, I'm closing the door," six o'clock, five o'clock, four o'clock, pick your time. I'm out of here. Now I'm home with the kids.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But we have these devices, which we've had for years, that follow us everywhere. And I've worked from home for a long time, had to create boundaries. A lot of leaders are struggling with that for the first time because school's home, work is home, home is home, food is home and your devices are always on. Any thoughts on boundaries and healthy practices for a time where it feels like Groundhog day? Where every day is the same.

Steve Cuss:

I know. Man, Carey, I really think we should turn the mics around on this one. I think you're further ahead than me.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, I don't know.

Steve Cuss:

Because COVID, for my particular field, it did blow my world up. I'm a full-time lead pastor of a church I love. I've been here 16 years, pour my heart and soul into this church and also released a book a year before COVID, that COVID escalated. I feel like I am failing at boundaries as I try to lead a church into unknown. We were not really a live streaming church before and now we are. We are now live streaming into all 50 states and we are having these exciting conversations about what does it look like to... Things that you've been doing for years, Carey, we're slow to adopt.

Steve Cuss:

At the same time, I'm trying to build and honor leaders who are wanting me to come in and help their organization. So I feel like a bad example.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's hard.

Steve Cuss:

Yeah. But I think you've probably been further down the road. It might be helpful to hear a couple of things you've found helpful.

Carey Nieuwhof:

One is a definite end of the workday, my wife and I. Because she now does what I do. She left law three years ago, released her own book. It's doing really, really well and she has lots of opportunities. Yeah, thank you.

Steve Cuss:

Awesome, yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But we're like, "When are we done today?" And we put a time on the calendar and we're finished. Are you working after dinner or not? Then sometimes one of us will work and the other won't. But there's no end to it. Honestly, and I'm not doing great at it either but I've got a section of my new book, which comes out in September, on mastering the art of saying no. But I feel like that is a daily discipline, the inbound, the number of requests, the number of opportunities. I realize there's sacred trust, they're not going to be here forever. It's just really hard because there's so many great opportunities.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Literally today, my team and I are working on what we call new filters. We're going to reboot the website so that when you fill out the form to request me to do something it's clearer in the future. But we haven't got this nailed, I'm trying to figure it out. Another thing I've been practicing probably more in the last year than in any time in my life, is a Sabbath. After a year of trying and mostly failing, I think I've had a couple under my belt now where I'm like, "That was actually really enjoyable." Giving myself permission to not be productive. Super hard for me, I'm so driven. I've had a couple moments where my wife and I are sitting around, it's just the two of us. We're empty nesters. And I'm just reading a book for reading a book. It's not podcast prep. It's not anything like that. We got our feet up and I'm like, "I've seen pictures of this in a magazine, but this has never been my life."

Carey Nieuwhof:

I know my kids crave that because they grew up around a workaholic dad and I'm like, "Okay, well just because last 20 years were incessant me, doesn't mean the next does." Then filling the space with good things, I would say. That life giving list has been really helpful. We reserved for the very first time, we're boaters. We always trailer it, it's cheaper, all that stuff. But everybody bought a boat so now it's super busy in the parking lot. So we got a slip this year. Yeah, it's going to be easier to use the boat. It's just there. Cost of entry is a lot lower in terms of time investment and just yeah, drive on over to the marina, pop off the tarp on the boat and head out.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You don't have to worry about can we get a parking spot at the ramp? Then we got to put it back, we got to be back at a certain time. We think we'll use that a lot more because I find if I just sit around, I just think about work all the time. And I'm like, "Oh, I could write this or I could do this or I can, oh, that talk isn't quite finished." When I'm on the water, that's all I think about.

Steve Cuss:

You know what I like about that answer as I was listening to it carefully there Carey, is what you taught us is how you lower the threshold to make it easier to trip into life giving habits. Like the boat, you wouldn't go boating as much because of the hassle. So you remove the hassle, which I'm sure will cost some money, but now there's a quicker access to life giving.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's cheaper than you think.

Steve Cuss:

Oh, sure.

Carey Nieuwhof:

My son said to me, my youngest son said to me, "I told you to do this years ago." I'm like, "Yeah, you always do. You're always way ahead of me." But part of that was like, "Do I want to fight for a parking space? Do I want to?" Then we have an EastWind, which is rare around here, but when it happens, it can be super challenging to put the boat back on the trailer because it's like, "I got one shot at this and I either hit the rocks and wreck the boat, or I hit the trailer." I've always hit the trailer. But the wind can whip up pretty quickly. That's not going to happen at the marina. There's peace of mind with that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

We'll see if we like it, maybe we won't do it again. But it was an opportunity to reduce the cost of entry mentally, emotionally, because so many times we're like, "Oh, the lake looks great," and I'm like, "Do you really want to trailer up the boat? Do you really want to go down to the... Do you want to... What if we don't get a parking spot? What if there's a line when we go to retrieve it?" Now it's like, "Well, that's our slip," so it's just going to sit there. It's a modest slip, but it's fine.

Steve Cuss:

Yeah, it's like the people who pack all their camping gear in tubs and just throw them in instead of pack to camp. They just throw in their stuff and go camping.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, you're right, yeah. Because if you've got to organize all that stuff.

Steve Cuss:

Yeah, you don't go.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Or a favorite chair on the deck. It's like buy yourself a \$100 dollar chair on the deck and go sit in that because it's comfortable and then you can just sit there and enjoy it.

Steve Cuss:

Yeah, it's good. One of the deeper tools I have cultivated this year is, I'm helping leaders name and notice their inner critic. Because I think what's going on with COVID, is we all think we should be doing better than we're doing. Then our inner critic kicks in and basically puts us into shame and condemnation. So I've had this exercise with people where I have them get into groups and name for each other what the message their inner critic says. Then the group's job is to listen to the adjectives and the adjectives always come back the same. Is they're condemning, unrelenting, harsh, unforgiving.

Steve Cuss:

Then it's a simple prayer. It's like, "What if I was at least as _____ to myself as God is?" That's been a simple tool I've used this year for myself. What if I was at least as patient with myself as God is? Because I tend to be pretty harsh about my own leadership capacity. I'm pretty forgiving of myself, except when it comes to leadership mistakes, then I beat myself up. What I've noticed is man, I'm giving more weight to my inner critic than to the God of the universe. I'm elevating one over the other.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Let's unpack that because there was an inner critic behind not mooring my boat for a long time. It feels like something rich people do, that's number one. Number two, is it a waste of money? Number three, hm. I don't really know. Can you be out on the water too much? Lots of other people don't have boats, et cetera, et cetera. For years, we had a 25 year old boat that barely ran. I mean, I'll put myself in that category for a while too. Now we have a more recent model that does run. But there's so much guilt associated with that and I think church life accelerates that.

Steve Cuss:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Any thought on that? I made a statement, but it was supposed to be a question.

Steve Cuss:

No, I think you're right. As I heard your list, because I grew up in a boating family and my grandfather used to build his own boat, but he'd live on it. It was the 34 foot boat we'd all go.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You could live on a 34 foot boat.

Steve Cuss:

Yeah. Oh, it was incredible. As I heard your list, I would simply say it is something that rich people have and what an incredible gift from God. There's the stigma of wealth is what I heard as the source of anxiety. I know in my own life I was raised low income and then kind of medium and now my parents would be high income. I have a poverty mindset and it helped me to realize that I don't know what to do with money and resource. I guess that's where I would go next.

Carey Nieuwhof:

No, that is a big issue because the stereotype, I think, for a lot of people in ministry is pastors are overpaid, et cetera. I would say I don't think that was ever an issue in our church. Most pastors are grossly underpaid and then they feel very guilty if they end up with a nice house or they drive a car that actually is shiny or, whatever. Whatever, or late model or that kind of thing. Yeah, you're navigating and all of that creates an anxiety in leadership that is more complicated. Any thoughts on navigating that?

Steve Cuss:

Oh, I just am a big believer in name it to tame it. I think once you know that there was some kind of stigma about a slip and a boat and wealth, now you have to do something. To me, the reason I do all my work on chronic anxiety is it absolutely competes with the gospel at every aspect of our life. So what's the good news? Is the good news that your belief about wealth

Carey Nieuwhof:

Your inner critic never has good news, I'll tell you that.

Steve Cuss:

Never. Getting back to this simple idea of the way you know you're anxious is you forget God's with you, the way you know that is the doom and the bad news. Chronic anxiety actually has a gospel and it has a message just like Jesus, just like the Roman empire had, just like America has a message. Chronic anxiety has a message. It's all on you. There's probably nothing you can do. You should have done it better. You should have known better. You should be further along. All these shoulds and oughts, as we famously say, we should all over ourselves.

Steve Cuss:

Just this simple idea of, well, what's the good news of Jesus? Of it's really true that Jesus sets us free, then I personally think that chronic anxiety becomes the number one way we can actually be transformed by Christ. Because to me, in the 21st century, it is the chief competitor for the heart. More than money. I know in the scripture, I know what the scripture said. But actually if you get past the whole God and mammon thing, which I agree, what Jesus and Paul spent most of their time talking about was the self. Or it's source of the flesh in the Bible or the man in the charismatic tradition is the wonderful phrase, the old man. The anthropos in the Greek. And Jesus and Paul, both and Peter, every time they talk about it, they have these stark warnings, crucify it, be wary of it. Don't give yourself to it.

PART 2 OF 4 ENDS [00:52:04]

Steve Cuss:

They're really quite alarmist. Jesus says anyone who denies self, takes up your cross daily. So all the argument I'm making is that self is evidenced by chronic anxiety. And therefore, that's our opportunity to actually have an encounter with Jesus. I think the number one challenge of faith leaders is we proclaim it more than we experience it. We proclaim the grace of God, and there's a big gap between experiencing it for ourselves. And I personally think here is related to this poverty mindset where we don't believe we deserve the grace. And you and I aren't talking about prosperity and money, we're just talking about the goodness of God.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's so funny because as you're sharing that, kill the flesh, there's a subtext in some strands of thinking in the church that would say, no, what you're killing is the fun. Don't have any fun anymore, don't enjoy your life, don't actually enjoy the goodness of God. Any truth to that? You ever heard that?

Steve Cuss:

I love that you asked that because in anxiety, the clinical term for this anxiety is Family Systems Theory. This is what I was trained in.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay.

Steve Cuss:

Bowen theory for people who like Google. So they actually train you to go into an organization and measure the level of playfulness. And that helps you to know how much anxiety they have. And the higher the level of playfulness, and also the higher the threshold for offense. In other words, how playful and how much do these people laugh and enjoy each other? The more playful, the less anxious they are. And how hard are they to offend? The harder they are to offend, the less anxious they are.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh my goodness.

Steve Cuss:

So therefore, ain't that something?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Whoa.

Steve Cuss:

So earnestness becomes an actual measurable trait of anxiety in a group. These people are all earnest, they're tiptoeing around each other. Don't say the wrong thing, this person can't take that. That's how you know they're in anxiety's grip. Also known as Facebook. Also known as Facebook.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Also known as people who are very devout, very serious about their faith, very devoted, very earnest, very... what's the word I'm looking for? Very serious. Very serious about their theology, very serious about work, very serious about the mission.

Steve Cuss:

Yes. So then let's name names. Let's talk about a devout person that you and I both... I'm sure you know, Bob. I don't know him, but Bob Goff.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yes.

Steve Cuss:

Now, there is a guy that anyone who wants to make a case that he's not devout with the work he's doing in the globe in the world.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh my goodness.

Steve Cuss:

Talk about someone like Christine Caine. Anyone want to make a case that she's not devout. You talk about people who are quick to laugh, have a blast doing some of the most challenging, gut-wrenching work in the world and some of the most playful people you could ever meet. So yes. Those earnest people. And I would just say Carrie, particularly for your young leaders just to be so careful not to indulge those people. Those people being the earnest, super spiritual put you on the top.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Don't say that, you just defended me.

Steve Cuss:

That mindset. I probably shouldn't have done it, but I remember early on, one of the guests at our church, she laid out every pastor who had ever let her down before she came to our church. And I was a bit less. I had less of a filter in wisdom back then. I was more obnoxious and I just said, "Why don't you behead me now and mount my head on your wall? Let's get it over with." Because my job as an anxiety coach is to notice recurring predictable patterns. Of course, I'm going to be pastor number seven, but I didn't say it in a way that was helpful because I'd meant to say it playfully. And what I was trying to say is, "can we get the offense out of the way and let's see what's on the other side of this?" That's where the good stuff is, is on the other side of the offense. But, of course, she took offence.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I can't stop laughing. That's really funny. Why don't you just behead me now?

Steve Cuss:

Because that's what she had mounted these pastors' heads on a wall like a deer. I'm next. And sure enough, she did to me too and she told everyone she'd ever met, as the Bible says, about all the terrible things I'd done to her. And that's anxiety spreading in a group.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Let's play the other side. Just to play devil's advocate for a moment. So I'm resonating with what you're saying, but the other side is okay, so we become this self-affirming, you only live once, best version of yourself, self-actualized. There is no such thing as sin or wrong. I'm just out for me and my pleasure where... You're not going there, but I can see some people going. So what is that? Is this what we're embracing?

Steve Cuss:

I love that. Yes. So you're actually describing hedonism, which I'm not a fan of myself. Personally, I don't subscribe to hedonism, but I have had people critical when I talk about this. When I say, look, our job isn't to be like Christ, our job is just to die to self. If you look in the scripture, Jesus didn't tell us to be like him, he just tells us to die to ourself. And people say, "Oh, well, you're just talking about laziness." Just sit around in life's hot tub, God does it all. I'm like, "No, no. Have you tried dying to yourself lately? It's hard work." So I I'm advocating that what anxiety does is it gets between us and it infects our ability to have a human to human connection.

Steve Cuss:

So as a leader, so many people either lionize me to be bigger than I am, or they demonize me to be a monster that I'm not. They make me bigger or they shrink me down. The people make me bigger. So in my case, I've done seven years of full-time theological education. I did a Bible degree in college, and then I went and did a Bible degree in graduate school. I'm just Bibled up. But because I have a gift of communication and a lot of experience and I'm paid for about 20 hours a week to prepare, and because I did seven years of full-time scripture study, I'm able to make meaning out of the Bible for people and help them connect with God. That's one of the things I can do, but people ascribed to me that I'm closer to Jesus than I really am, or that I really might be. I may not be any closer to God than the man that changes the diapers in the nursery. But because I move people, they say I'm. So then they put me on the circle pedestal.

Carey Nieuwhof:

They lionize you.

Steve Cuss:

Yes. Lionize me. The other people because of their baggage. I have so many people in the church right now. "The last church really hurt me." I was just seeing on Instagram, Steve Carter, I'm sure you know Steve who was...

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yes. I know Steve.

Steve Cuss:

What a great human being. He posted this amazing thing on Instagram. Somehow he got caught up. I don't know if he started the thread or he jumped in on it, but people told him that "the church was, the church hurt me, the church hurt me." And Steve Carter, formerly of Willow Creek posts on Instagram. He says, "I used to say the church hurt me, but as I think about it, five people hurt me, but I call it the church." I thought that was amazing of him just saying, "You know what's brought me healing?" He's saying is noticing it's not the church, it's five people in a big church. So a lot of people come to my church and they say, "the church hurt me, the church hurt me, the last pastor did [blank]."

Steve Cuss:

And they do what I diagnose the same species syndrome because I'm the same species as the former pastor. I'm already under suspicion. And they can't see me as a human being, they see me through the lens of their pain. And so in my anxiety coaching, what I'm trying to help leaders do is to learn to have an exactly human-sized encounter with other people. So the lady, who I've foolishly said to put my head on

a wall, what I was trying to say was, "can we be humans with each other? Can we stop this cycle of pastors letting you down? Let me just let you down and let's be humans and see what happens."

Carey Nieuwhof:

So as funny as that was, and thank you for that. How would you approach it now if she comes in and says, "Well, my last pastor..." She names all six, all seven and you're number seven or whatever and you're having that conversation. What would the slightly more mature, wiser, older Steve say to her these days? How would you diffuse that?

Steve Cuss:

Yes. That's a great question. I think I would actually use the same words interestingly enough, but I think I've matured in my posture. And I think that was the mistake is it sounded smarmy. It sounded like I was above her. I think I now know how to say, "can I share a pattern that I'm hearing that I'm afraid that you'll never get to know me. You'll only put my head on a wall like you did these other pastors. These pastors that let you down, it might be that some of them really were abusive, but it's also probably true that some of them were exactly human-sized, and you had expectations of them that no one could measure up. I want to be able to measure up. I want you to know right now when I hear that it makes me anxious to hear that. And I just want to name that to you because I'm going to let you down. How about this? How about I let you down right now? And can we get it over with?" It'll be quite similar, but my...

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yes, but I see what you mean. That is a very different conversation.

Steve Cuss:

Yes. And less attacking.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's very refreshing.

Steve Cuss:

Yes. The goal of anxiety management is never to put someone on the back foot, it's always to invite connection. So some of the people I train these tools in, they do unfortunately wield them. It's always to move toward each other. So I think that's where I've probably matured.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So many people come to mind as you're describing that scenario of what I call roast pastor because you realize you're just the next victim. And understanding that, I used to take that very personally, very seriously. It used to be very wounding, but being able to spot the patterns actually does two things for me. It makes me understand. I'm like, "Oh, I think I see where this is going. Okay. Beware, beware. This could be a rabbit trail, this could take down the organization. We have to be careful." But it also gives me empathy. There's something in her heart, his heart that is hurting that makes them want to hurt other people. I may not be the person to solve that, but what are some other benefits of being able to spot the patterns in terms of managing your own anxiety?

Steve Cuss:

I think you named the number one benefit, which is empathy rather than self-righteousness because if I'm not moving toward empathy like you just said, I get self-righteous in my head and I then demonized that person. In my immature days, I would gang up on them. I'd actually use... I'm not proud of this, but I'd use my power as a pastor. "Hey, we all agree this person's crazy." That kind of thing. Now what it looks like as an anger fantasy. The way I know I'm self-righteous is when I'm having an anger fantasy about someone that's wounded me. So this empathy move you're describing, that has really set me free. That same move you made. I would simply say the extra move I make in my coaching with people is helping you figure out how do I... Because the general rule of anxiety is you try to put it back where it belongs.

Steve Cuss:

Whoever's generating the anxiety, you try to make them carry the weight of it. So if this person is demonizing you same species syndrome or pastors can't be trusted, I'm trying to figure out a way for her or him to carry the weight of that rather than me spinning on it. And I usually feed it back to them now in a way to give them an opportunity to change.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay.

Steve Cuss:

And to say, "Hey, can I share with you what I'm noticing and what I'm hearing?" And I'm usually confessing. "I want you to know I'm afraid right now. I'm afraid that I can't help you see who I really am because all you can see as another pastor is going to let me down. So I just want to name that. What's it like for you to hear that from me?" Does that... And so now there's actual gospel opportunity and I've had great success with a lot of people to actually move toward each other. And then I've probably still got... Most churches have five or six police, I've probably got about that in my church. After doing that once and now measuring are they wielding my words against me? Are they wielding my vulnerability against me? In which case I categorize them as a usual suspect bully, or are they moving toward the light? Like Henry Cloud teaches us. You need to give people...

Steve Cuss:

If they're moving toward it, now there's actually... I no longer am categorizing them, they're a real human being. And then the bullies, I want to say I've got about six that have been with me most of the time I've been at my church. I always bring an elder. I no longer share vulnerability with them, I mostly listen. And what I've done with a couple of them is say to them, "What is the goal of this meeting? It feels to me like the goal is Steve loses." Now, maybe that's not the goal. And again, I'm not being smarmy, I'm not being top down. I'm just saying this is what it feels like to be me right now. I think the goal is step on my neck. If that's the goal, let's just get it over with. If the goal is defeat, then come on. Let's go.

Carey Nieuwhof:

How do they respond to that?

Steve Cuss:

Well, so again, it stopped some people in their tracks and then most of those people, to be frank, Carey, they do better for a few weeks and then they regress. But at least it stops me. It puts the anxiety back where it belongs on the one generator. That's the win for me is I get to go home and say, "Well, I said my peace and I was heartfelt and now they have to live with themselves."

Carey Nieuwhof:

One of the things we've talked on about a couple of times in this conversation is the criticism. So I'm thinking about my public inbox, social media, same for a lot of pastors where you get highly offendable people. I'm thinking about one email I got about a guest I had on my podcast. And this person didn't like where this person stood on a particular hot button issue. So how dare I have this person on my podcast? And we get that stuff on social media, we get that stuff in the inbox is pastors get that you should assign the petition, why aren't you standing up to the governor? What do you mean about masks? What about vaccines? And it's clear that I'm not having a dialogue with you. It is clear.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I'm thinking about this email I got yesterday and I read. My team sent it to me like, "How do we respond?" And I'm like... This triggered something very deep in her. Something that she was very angry about that had really nothing to do with the conversation, just that I know where this person stands on X. You talk to this person, therefore, you have made a mistake.

Steve Cuss:

Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And I didn't know how to respond to that because it was an email, not a social media comment. So I said no response or thank you. Your views are noted, Carey. That kind of thing. Very neutral because I realize if you go down that rabbit hole, I'm going to be there for a year. Nobody's different. She's not changing or he's not changing in that case. And pastors have probably and leaders have had more of that than anything over the last year, whether the stance they took or didn't take on the election, whether it was the mask, anti-mask thing, vaccine, no vaccine, opening, reopening. They're getting positions thrown at them. And that generates anxiety in me, still does. I still feel that stuff.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What do you do with those... What I'm going to call boiler plate. It's not like, "Hey Steve, when you shared this one point in your message on Tuesday." I'm not a frequent flyer, I'm talking about people who are just firing off missiles on their pet project or pet issue or pet doctrine. And you just happened to be the latest recipient.

Steve Cuss:

Yes. So in your unique world of being quite a public figure that gets a lot of online communication, I'm not sure if this applies. I was hearing that exchange with the email and this lady and thinking. Your response just closes the door and that's probably wisdom is just to say, basically, you're sending the message, "We're not going to play."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. I was trying to send that message because I have tried to play. And Occasionally, I still try to play. And it it never goes well.

Steve Cuss:

Yes. I think that's right because I think that's the nature of email and social media. I think in a church context or business leaders with organizational customers, it's an ongoing relationship. And I think the beauty is if you can lead with vulnerability, if your goal is two things, one is to name the dynamic. So what you did for me, Carey, is you actually didn't give me any content. You didn't say here's what the email is about, here was the issue. You actually beautifully named the dynamic for me. I did this, I had this guy on, she didn't like it, she had this. That's dynamic language. You're plotting out almost like chess moves. He did this, she did this. So I think once the leader can name the dynamic, then you really can lead with vulnerability. And it very quickly shows you who's who.

Steve Cuss:

So the first time you vulnerable, some people will use your words against... they'll wield them against you, and now you know. And it saves you so much time. It saves you so many meetings with what I call... You called them frequent flyers. I love that. I call them usual suspects. Every church has usual suspects. I was doing a workshop recently and it was over Zoom and open up the chat, it was all for pastors. I said, "Okay. First question. How many people are in your church?" And it was just a pure numerical. Second question. How many usual suspects are in your language? How many frequent flyers? The biggest number was six. We had people with thousands of people in their church. We all have frequent flyers. So starting with vulnerability is a great tool because then you know how they act afterwards.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What does that sound like? So let's say I was going to your church and I'm like, "I can't believe you quoted..." Well, I've had this. I quoted Jordan Peterson in a message a couple of years ago and someone was grossly offended.

Steve Cuss:

Yes. Let's say the email lady was actually a member of your church at Connexus. Vulnerability looks like, "Hey, when you sent that email, it obviously triggered something really deep in you because I received it with a lot of heat. It had a lot of heat on it. Now, I know that emails can be tricky. Was that your intention to be very angry at me because I hosted somebody who has a view? Is that what you meant?" That would be naming the dynamic. And if they're like, "Yes, Carey. Slippery slope." You know what it's like.

Steve Cuss:

Then I think you'd say, "Well, we're so far apart. We're never going to agree on that because I'm a curious person. I love learning from all kinds of people, including people I may or may not agree with. And I'll just let you know it hurts me to be a broad-brush. I don't think you like being broad-brush categorized. Right ma'am? I don't either. It hurts me when someone makes a broad statement about me that's not true because actually it's not true that just because I had him on my show means that I'm broadcast." And then she may or may not look for you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's a much more nuanced response than I gave. And I'm going to read the transcript and go over that again. That's really good.

Steve Cuss:

I'm only putting that context in your church because you'd have an ongoing relationship. I'm not sure.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I think our content gets accessed a million and a half, 2 million times a month. So it's like we get a lot of those emails.

Steve Cuss:

And you do not have a relationship with that person.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I don't have a relationship. I couldn't even tell you who this person's name was right now.

Steve Cuss:

The email or the message we're not going to play, I think is wise. I'm not saying it's more just if we put that in a...

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yes. But if it's a relationship, I can see that. If it was a client or it was someone I knew from our church, even though I'm not engaged day-to-day there, I would not treat it the same way, but that is a very intelligent approach to how to handle that because you're exactly right. I fit her template of, or it could have been a him, his template of what a bad person does by hosting people like this.

Steve Cuss:

That's right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And it was guilt by association.

Steve Cuss:

So there's just a couple of simple tools for people. Number one is the idea that you can only lead people who are moving toward you emotionally. And every one of us in our organization, we have people who are not moving toward us emotionally. No matter what you say, they've already decided. And more insight from you does not help. And that's the fallacy that some of your listeners are in is I must give them more insight from me so that they'll move toward me emotionally. So that's why I'm saying, hey, this lady sends you an email, she's not moving toward you and you don't owe anything so you say, "We're not going to play the game."

Steve Cuss:

The other thing that I've found really helpful is just to simply think about anxiety in four spaces. There's the space inside me, there's the space between me and God, there's the space between me and you,

and there's the space inside you. Anxiety is generated when we obsess over the fourth space. So Carey, if you and I were in conflict and I'm spending all my time saying, why is Carey doing it that way? Why would he say... Any kind of why are they doing it this way, that's fourth space.

Steve Cuss:

That's the one space I can not control, but the other three spaces, I actually can take a lot of responsibility for. Space inside me, how I react to you. And this whole conversation got started with politics and all of that. The simple idea that anxiety is contagious between people. So if I see you as the problem, if I first look at what am I doing to contribute to the problem? So if I have a critic that's not moving toward me and I'm chasing them, trying to get them to approve of me or understand I'm part of the problem. And by simply noticing that and stopping your action, you can actually change your relationship with critics. You can't change the critic. That's fourth space, that's holy ground.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I spent a few years trying that, I gave up.

Steve Cuss:

Me too. So, one of the things your listeners can do right now is they can simply say, what is mine to Carey? What is God's to Carey? What is this to Carey? And oftentimes, we are obsessed with the third, what's theirs to care. We are trying to manage what's theirs. And so this lady that emailed you, she's got a whole lot of work. And what's sad, Carey, is if she stopped believing the story she's telling herself, which is the science she's in anxiety's grip because she's not able to see what's true, which is that you are a curious human that learns from a broad range of people. I hope that's true.

Steve Cuss:

What's also true, I know that's true. I've been listening to you for years. What's also true is it's not true that if I listened to your guests, I'm suddenly infected with his opinions. That's not true. I'm able to manage my own views when I hear someone that I disagree with, but she's so wrapped up in what's not true that I really wish she could get help to stop sending emails because she's not just emailing you, she's emailing or calling many people.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, that's what it felt like. It felt like this is probably not the first email. And when we get those, how do we respond? And we try to respond with empathy, with compassion, and I actually felt bad about it. But part of the boundary for me to use Henry Cloud and John Townsend's language was I can spend a day on this. I don't think she's going to be any different at the end of the day. And I'm going to be more anxious and I won't be able to sleep. So here another dynamic. I don't know how many emails we got, we probably got 1,000 messages over the last day or two. I don't know. There's a lot.

Carey Nieuwhof:

99% of them were really positive, but guess what I just did? What I tell leaders not to do. I obsessed over the one. That dynamic that causes anxiety. And when I coach people, friends, my wife who's into a whole new career and all that stuff, I'm like, you file that under the encouragement file. And then you go and I have stuff in my encouragement file, but that real estate from the one negative voice, the one critic who's at you, it eats at me. What do I do to minimize because you're right. I have allowed that

person who I can't change to occupy my inner space and maybe even my space with God. So what do I do about that?

Steve Cuss:

Yes. I try to figure... I do two things. I used to do what you said you used to do, which is, "Hey, get over it." It's outbalance ratio, it's only a few. And that didn't work. I was still hurt. So I thought, okay, I got to dig deeper. So I dug deeper actually in the last couple of years. This is a newer tool. So the old tool is okay, what is it in me that I need that I'm not getting from this person? And for me, it's being misunderstood. Anytime I don't feel seen, I get anxious. And so knowing that helps me diagnose, why did that email hurt? Oh, it's because she's not seeing me. She's not seeing who I am.

Steve Cuss:

And then the next thing I do is I actually allow my anxiety to run for about 30 to 60 minutes. I set a timer because I used to believe the lie that I could stop it. And then when I couldn't stop it, as you might imagine with my unique field, I would go into a very sophisticated form of shame. You're the freaking anxiety guy and you can't stop it. It was that. So I thought, okay, what if I let it run rampant for 30 to 60 minutes? So actually, on my Capable Life website, I filmed a case study on a text I got from a leader saying "we need to meet." And on the case study, I got my leader's permission on this and I read the text and it's, "We need to meet. It's urgent. And it's about church related matters and I didn't want to meet before the sermon because I didn't want to infect your sermon." So obviously, this is alarming.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Already destroyed. You're already destroyed.

PART 3 OF 4 ENDS [01:18:04]

Steve Cuss:

Yeah, destroyed. And so I went from spun up to calm in 90 minutes. And then we didn't meet for three weeks. I filmed the case study before we met, before I knew what we were meeting about. I filmed... "Okay guys, here's the text, and here's how you work my tools." And so step number one is I know, I always feel like I'm in trouble when I get those texts. That's why I get anxious, because I feel like I've done something wrong.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, you're going back to your childhood or something like that. Yeah.

Steve Cuss:

Yep. Step number two, I let my anxiety run rampant, 30 to 60 minutes. And somewhere in there, this may sound funny, I literally set a timer. I'm like, "Okay, that's enough of that." But what I'm doing is I'm chasing my anxiety rabbit trails. And so what I did is I had all these crazy fantasies about everything he wanted to meet about, and it was crazy. Seven families are leaving the church, this person's... And then what I do is I get on top of... I'm observing myself like a sociologist. I'm studying my anxious brain and I'm enjoying it. I'm like, "Wow, man, 25 years of teaching anxiety, you are as crazy as the day you were born," because only one of these options can be true. Most of them contradicted each other. I don't know if you've ever done this but-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, yeah.

Steve Cuss:

All right? So that was step two, is let myself get anxious and study it. Step three was externalize it. So I grabbed my wife and I said, "Here's the text I got. I'm really anxious." And we hugged for quite a while, which is on my life-giving list, a elongated hug from my wife. But by naming it to somebody I now had power over it, I'm no longer in its grip, because I've confessed it. And that takes a lot of humility.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That is a form of confession. Isn't it?

Steve Cuss:

It is, yeah. It's a form of confession. And then I pulled out my trusty life-giving list and I did three things on the list, which is jog my dog, which Brody loves that he's on my list, he benefits, talk to God and get outdoors. And I did all three of those at once. And I was out with Brody for about 40 minutes. That's where I'm doing my work on, "wait a minute, God's with me, what am I believing, what do I know to be true?" I'm believing all these catastrophic things, I'm believing I'm in trouble, what do I know to be true? This leader that texted me is a dear leader in our church. This leader believes in me, loves our church, pours his heart and soul out, that's what's true. What's also true is, this leader might have necessary feedback for me that's a gift, about my blind spots. Maybe I had made a mistake. Here's what's true. God's used me with my mistakes before so, I start to let the gospel really infect my anxiety.

Steve Cuss:

And then I became excited about the meeting, because you know what, God's going to be in that meeting and this is a person... I really like this person. Now here's what's interesting, Carey. So I film the case study, we meet three weeks later. I got four of those texts over Christmas break, this was one of them. I got four of those texts and the fourth one, I was vulnerable. And I said, "Hey, I want you to know I did really well with three, but this fourth one's going to send me over the edge." Not your fault, you didn't know, but what are we meeting about? It's going to help me to know what we're meeting about. So, I just knew my limit, but that was the steps I took to manage it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That is so helpful and so practical. I'm curious, two things. One, why didn't you ask him? Because, I think I might've done what you did to number four with number one. It's like, "Hey, I'm going to freak out about this, what are we meeting about?" I'd rather know-

Steve Cuss:

Completely viable option.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, okay. So, that's not out of bounds.

Steve Cuss:

That's what I did with number four. But obviously in my field, I'm coaching people all the time on this. I wanted to... This is such a common thing for church leaders and here's what I noticed. I've actually surveyed church leaders on Twitter about this very text. And the overwhelming response is, fourth space, the space inside them, so the church leader gets the text and they say, "Why don't you know how to communicate with me properly?" Right? And I wanted to give church leaders a tool that has nothing to do with a messenger, because if you've got 2000 people in your church, heck if you've got a hundred people in your church, you cannot coach everybody on how to communicate with you. That's unreasonable. And what helped me with this particular person who texted me is this is someone who's for me, we're in the trenches together.

Steve Cuss:

And I still felt the same as the usual suspect critic. I had put him in the same group in my anxiety and that to me is like, "Okay, the tool I needed to develop for people has nothing to do with a messenger." Now what had to happen in this specific case, is I asked his permission, "Can I make a case study in his why..." He was mortified, "I had no idea." I was like, "Oh yeah, this is what happens, we're pastors, we're all crazy." He's like, "Man, well tell me." And he said, "How should I communicate next time?" So that happened, but I didn't-

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's fascinating.

Steve Cuss:

But I tend to blame, I tend to say, Oh, come on, don't you know I didn't-

Carey Nieuwhof:

I get that. I'm writing about my next book, when I'm on vacation and somebody I barely know texts me, I'm like, "Don't you know, I'm on vacation?" It's like, no. And I try to be sensitive about it. I was texting a pastor, a very well-known church, huge church. And I was going to text him with just this, "Hey, found this really cool article." So I sent him an email privately, just like, "Hey, I don't know whether this is your day off, but just in case." He got back to me right away. But I feel responsible for that. Like interrupting people's peace and then when people text me at eight o'clock at night and I'm trying to relax with my wife, I'm like, "Don't text me now." But that's me trying to manage other people. Isn't it?

Steve Cuss:

Well, I just wanted to show the power of the gospel in your inner mind when you're anxious, because what's interesting is on Twitter, the majority of the pastors said, "Well, what you need to do is tell them how to... Let them know what it feels like." And I was like, "Yeah, it's not that, that's not viable, but isn't it better..." I came home from my life-giving experience, completely relaxing into the grace of God.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's also not scalable. You can tell him, but you got 2000 other people who're trying.

Steve Cuss:

That's my point. And most of them to your earlier point, most of them are outstanding human beings. But what we do is anxiety says to us, "they're out to get you." The imposter syndrome, they're onto you,

but what's true is, like in this guy's case, he forgot he texted me, that's why it took three weeks. Because you know what happened? This is what happens, Carey. He was anxious about something, so he, cause anxiety is always contagious he just dumped it on me and then he felt better.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right. His anxiety is yours now.

Steve Cuss:

Yes. So that's what really happened. And we ended up talking about something that was a challenge that wasn't about me being in trouble. But in my mind it was until I did my work. So yeah, that would be some.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, I think you could hold court here once a month. This is so rich. What I do want to finish on for this episode anywhere this round Steve is, because I have thought about that a lot, writing a book over the last couple of years, it's out in the fall, but one of the points in my new book is that technology has bad manners. There is a sense human beings, and I play that scenario where I'm on vacation. If you saw me on vacation, all right, I'm at the beach with my family, hanging out, boat nearby with some friends on the beach and you're like, "Oh, there's Carey, I got a question for Carey." You would have the sense to go, "You know what, it looks like he's having fun with his kids and he's going to take them water skiing and I think I'm going to leave him alone."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right? Most people, 99%, 90% of the population would be like, "Hmm, I'm going to leave Steve alone he's having a good time with his family." Or, you're at a restaurant you're having a romantic night with your wife, most people in your church are going to leave you alone. They're not going to come up and bug you. But technology doesn't know that. And I counted up my inboxes. I have 11 inboxes, which is insane. Everywhere I look. And this phone goes with me everywhere. Right? People are messaging me. Can you do this? Hey, what about this? What do you think about this? Boundaries for pastors back to... Here we are, we're all working from home. The world is permanently disrupted in some way, shape or form.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And we've got inbound all day long and those texts are coming at pastors, whether it's, "Hey, we need to meet right away, it's urgent, didn't want to bug you but I am now." Those kinds of texts to, "Hey, I've got a cousin whose sister died, needs someone to do the funeral," through to "About sermon," to, "Hey, my small group isn't meeting on Wednesday what should I do?" Right? You get a million of those or entrepreneurs, clients, suppliers, it's that 24 hour connectivity thing. Any thoughts on that? Like just a really quick softball for the final question.

Steve Cuss:

I heard a New Testament scholar named Shane Wood say this. He said, "Our phones, we all carry a mini tower of Babel around in our pocket everywhere we go." I thought that was an amazing comment.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That is good.

Steve Cuss:

I'll pass that on from Shane Wood. If I can speak to pastors and business leaders, I think you have to check the size of the circle and how many people are in the circle of who can get to you anytime. And the problem I run into is twofold, is I have hundreds of people in that circle that each have one thing once in a while. And so that adds up to me having hundreds of things all the time. And then in my early days, I didn't chunk out my calendar and so I was always reactive with my time. So I'm a big believer in turning off the inbox while you're doing creative work, vision work, pastoral work it's not going anywhere.

Steve Cuss:

And then chunking your time like, I do think some of these old sages, like Eugene Peterson are onto something, no one is going to manage your relationship with God for you. If I could speak to pastors, my opinion is that ministry actually gets in the way of your relationship with God more than it helps it. That's a blanket statement so it's not always true, but I have personally found ministry to be toxic to my relationship with Jesus. Therefore, I need to be more intentional, work harder and chunk my calendar.

Steve Cuss:

And if I don't, I am pulled every which way, because like you, I've had people actually had the audacity to call me and say... This is verbatim. "I know it's your day off, but I don't care." And so with that particular person, this is years ago, I said, "Look let me let you into my world and the world of every pastor I know, it's really hard for me to close the door to the church in my mind, this is my day off if you open the door, I will walk through it." I'm like an addict at the pub that first drink I'll get drunk. You open the door, I will walk through it. So can you help me because I am incapable of staying on this side of the door. That was early, now I can do it.

Steve Cuss:

But the audacity of someone to say that it's your day off but I don't care. And that's what I gave that person is, I just let them know, you probably must not understand the tyrannous world a pastor lived in and how hard we fight for the free time we have. Because, I'm on call 24/7 to probably a couple of hundred people in my life. And I'm not going to say no to them, but out of 200, the percentage that ends up in the hospital, has a loved one with whatever that my life gets interrupted on a pretty regular basis. And honestly, Carey, it's a privilege that I get to be like, no question. That you invite me into your life and let me share in some of the worst moments, that's a privilege. The problem isn't you, the problem is that there's 300 of you and I don't know how to sift it. So that would be my response.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And that's fine. This will be another conversation for another day, but you talk about the circles of people, literally there's diagram in the book about the circles of people who are the names, who are the priorities, what is your triage in getting back to people.

Steve Cuss:

It feels so rude, doesn't it? But it's so necessary.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, I wouldn't be here. If I hadn't figured that out, I would have been swept out to sea. That would have been it. It's just too much and you got to figure it out and you have to be prepared to be misunderstood sometimes. Right? So Steve, any final thoughts we're heading into an unstable world, I think you've given us a lot of food for thought. Any final thought or encouragement or tactic for leaders?

Steve Cuss:

Yeah, look, this may sound self-serving but I would say you have a time management coach, you have a spiritual director, get an anxiety coach, for you, your team and the reason is not self-serving is people like Pete Scazzero do this work. Rich Flodus, Jim Harrington, Trisha Taylor. There is actually quite a few people that specialize in chronic anxiety. Me too, I'd be honored to work with anyone, but you can't navigate this on your own because it's a science and a field that anyone can understand, but you have to be exposed to it. You're not going to intuitively get your way through. So I would say get an anxiety coach. My thing Carey is, when I was a trauma chaplain, the gurney would come through the double doors, the person's had the car wreck they're in the head brace.

Steve Cuss:

The EMT is pumping their chest. It's all happening. But then two minutes later, the family shows up and they're so anxious. They just got the call, they've rushed in and what I learned from that was, whatever condition the family was in before the emergency, it didn't create the crisis in the family, it just exposed it. Say, if there was toxicity, abuse, secret keeping, black sheep that all just gets heightened. And my job as a chaplain, speaking of name, the dynamic and anxiety in groups, my job was to take about two minutes and figure all that out right on the fly so I could help this family. I just would say to people, if 2020 was tough on you, 2020 did not create the situation you're in, it exposed it. And I don't say that to make anyone feel guilty or ashamed.

Steve Cuss:

I'd just going to say, if you don't do something different in 2021, 2021 will not be different. It will not be different because what 2020 did was give you a gift of an opportunity to dig deeper, figure out some of these tools. Like these are tools that is in a science known as Family Systems, so it's been around since 1954, it's an old established theory. My favorite thing about the theory is it names what we already know. There's very little new I've told you today. I've just named what you've already felt and experienced. Pretty much everything I've talked about was you, Carey. You have a story for, because you've lived it. That's what I love about this theory. So I would say to folks, whether it's this theory or Enneagram work or wherever you find your mental and emotional spiritual health, be intentional about it this year and you can actually be different.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. And I would just add to that how important it is because anxiety grows as things grow. If you've got a problem with 10 people, it's going to be 10 times worse at a hundred, it'll be even worse at a thousand or 10,000.

Steve Cuss:

And your character is exposed as things grow.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, you're just going to lose it because, you're... My whole approach you can chart out, this will be an interesting exercise for the future for you and me, but pre burnout versus post burnout, which 30 years of leadership, my life hangs in the middle now that burnout episode but it was unscalable. It was just unscaled and now I'm managing a whole lot more and it's not like I'm not anxious, but it's like, oh, there's all these strategies that helped me figure out what do you do with the person who just emails you because you hit his or her trigger issue. Right? And then it's like, "Oh, I know what to do with that now." Whereas before that could have gripped me for days. So.

Steve Cuss:

I love that you said that and I hate that I keep interrupting because I'm all excited when I hear you talk and you're trying to wrap this up, but what you just named is so important. It's not that you eliminate anxiety, it's that you deepen your ability to manage yours and their anxiety. And that your capacity has grown because your burnout wasn't because you had too much to do it's because you had unaddressed chronic anxiety and these false beliefs. So yeah, I'd lead people to that too, is like, your capacity to manage is what grows through this. And that's good news too.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And the legacy you leave ultimately is with your family and with the people closest to you. Because if I'm anxious at work, because work was, oh, so bad, then I'm anxious at home and I'm anxious with my kids and I'm anxious on vacation and I'm anxious at night and I'm not sleeping properly. And all those things that just about took me out 15 years ago. So this is why I'm so committed and you have an open invitation. You come back whenever you want, and you can just counsel all of us, Steve. And some of this is a little bit selfish because I always learn and I always grow with you. So if people want to find you, best website and also where they'll find you on the socials.

Steve Cuss:

Yeah. Best website is stevecusswords.com. I'm actually launching a seven day anxiety jumpstart for people who want to try the first space, the space in me. So they can sign for that. And then we'll get.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's to release anxiety just to be clear. It doesn't increase your anxiety over seven days, I can do that without you, Steve. No problem.

Steve Cuss:

Oh, that's awesome. Yeah and then best place to find me in this field is on Twitter, which is [@stevecusswords](https://twitter.com/stevecusswords).

Carey Nieuwhof:

Ah, so good. Steve, you're gift to so many leaders. Thank you so much for being with us today.

Steve Cuss:

Ah, it's always a treat, Carey. Thanks for having me. I really appreciate it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, we talked about a lot of things and if you want to see the links to everything we talked about, including the life-giving leader list, which we keep talking about is that you can just go to careynieuwhof.com/episode406. So thank you to our partners, Pro MediaFire. You can get 10% off your social media strategy for life by going to promediafire.com/carey and by Convoy of Hope. You can bring hope to the hurting and the hungry by texting COH to 68828, or visit convoyofhope.org to donate. Well, I've got a What I'm Thinking About, segment. I'm going to talk to you about just a couple of small hacks, nothing at the magnitude of what we talked about, but some very small things that when I'm having an anxious moment really help me. Just three tips, I want to give you, we're going to get to that in a moment. But first I want to tell you about the next episode and we are in legend territory because I interview the one and only John Maxwell. Here's an excerpt.

John Maxwell:

I think most leaders try to hold onto what they have too long. I think that when you hand the baton off, you shouldn't hand the baton off because you're tired. I never know anybody to run a relay race, when the guy that was handing off saying, "Oh my gosh." You got to hand that baton off when you are at your peak best and did your best, you got to let go. If you don't let it go at your best time, when you're at your top of your game, your team ain't going to win.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And now it's time to talk about What I'm Thinking About. And I am thinking about leadership, anxiety, Steve and I talked about there's a lot to deal with now. I generally don't have a very anxious personality, but I have days and it starts to impact me, I can't sleep at night or I'm stressed, or I'm busy. And there's a lot of reasons why, I mean, leadership is hard. But when I have those days, here's three things that really help me. Number one, I focus on what I know is true not on what I feel is true. My feelings lie to me. You have to pay attention to your feelings, you really have to pay attention, but sometimes I'm like, "Oh, those people are out to get me." Or this is really not going well. Or I might as well just pack it in, stuff like that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Everything's bad in a way I can handle this. Things are totally out of control. I'm dead if this keeps up. Whoa, stop. Okay. Just do a full stop. And maybe that's what you feel is true in the moment, but it's not true. And sometimes my brain has to kick in and remind my body that, "Hey, that's not true." Okay. Not a hundred percent. Maybe some of it's true, but most of that, isn't true. And so I got to focus on what I know is true not on what I feel is true and my emotions don't always tell me the truth. And here's another reminder, okay? God is less done with you than you are. I often find I have to keep encouraging myself because it's like, ah, I think I'm done. It's like, no, God, isn't done with you, right?

Carey Nieuwhof:

If you're breathing, he's still not done with you. So, don't quit. Don't get discouraged. So that's number one, focus on what you know is true, not on what you feel is true. And then number two, this is really practical. Get a few quick, small wins. When you're stressed and overwhelmed, you feel like you're losing everywhere. So what do you do? Like I'm talking super simple. Okay. Because you got a team that's unmanageable in that moment or you've got all this inbound criticism. So here's a small win, clear off your desk. Okay. I work better in a clean environment, just get rid of those papers. You'll feel better. Answer the emails that are sitting at the bottom of your inbox, the ones that have been there for a

week, just answer them. Boom. You're at inbox zero. Write a thank you card you've been meaning to write or do the software update on your laptop.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You see those are small, but the thing about leadership is you rarely go from beginning to end quickly. You can update your software on your laptop pretty quickly. You can clear off your desk pretty quickly. And it's from start to finish. I did that the other night. I had a rough day and I went in to town and I hand washed my car and it was great. It was dirty when I went into the bay, it was clean when I came out and looked fantastic. I know it's small, it's trivial, but I felt better after. So get a few quick, small wins. And then number three, this one I've had to use it different times. Call it a day. Okay. You're melting down at 2:30 in the afternoon, it's all falling apart, you know you can predict that the next two hours are just going to be a schlimazel is, is that even a word? I think it is.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And you know what you do, you're just like, that's it. I'm done. I'm done for today. I'm going to come back tomorrow, but I'm going to come back rested and then give yourself a break. Go for a walk, take a nap, watch a movie, read a book, come back rested, refresh, go hang out with a friend, go grab coffee. A rested you is a better you. And you wake up in the morning and you've reset. And your battery is fully charged and you've got a new day. So I hope that helps you. Hey, I have content like this on my website. You can go check it out, careynieuwhof.com.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Leaders around the world now access this content, my website, the emails that they read and this podcast almost two million times a month. And if you think that a little more than this could help you, I've also got an email list that 80,000 leaders are a part of, and you can simply go to careynieuwhof.com/email to sign up there and all things live over at careynieuwhof.com including this show and the show notes. So thank you so much. We got a great set of guests coming up. Can I tease out a couple more episodes for you before we wrap up today? Who else is coming up? And again, if you subscribe get it automatically every week, Rick Warren, Jon Acuff, Annie F. Downs, Ian Morgan, that's like almost the Nashville crew. Anyway. We've also got Amy Edmondson, Alan George, who pioneered Life.Church online, their whole online presence. And so many more Simon Sinek did I mentioned him and yeah, subscribers you get that for free. Thanks so much for listening. And I hope our time together today helps you lead like never before

Speaker 1:

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

PART 4 OF 4 ENDS [01:42:27]