

Announcer:

Welcome to The Carey Nieuwhof's Leadership Podcast. A podcast all about leadership, change and personal growth. The goal? To help you lead like never before. And now your host, Carey Nieuwhof.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, hey everybody. Welcome to episode 408 of the podcast. It's Carey here, and I hope our time together today helps you lead like never before. You're going to love this conversation, I think, today with Jon Acuff. He's back on the podcast, and this time I talked to Jon about reinventing yourself during the crisis. So like a lot of you Jon had to completely rethink everything he does when coronavirus hit. Why? Because he's a public speaker. He just gets on an airplane multiple times a week, flies all over the world to speak to leaders and that stopped. And what did he do? So we get really honest and behind the scenes about that... plus how to create better online content. Jon has a massive social media following, and he's a lot of fun. And we talk about the surprising solution to overthinking.

Carey Nieuwhof:

This episode is brought to you by ServeHQ. You can go to servehq.church to sign up for your free 14 day trial. Use the code CAREY to get 10% off for life. And by our friends at Belay... you can visit belaysolutions.com/cnlp to get Belay's bonus resource, Five Essential Strategies to Unleash your Productivity. Wwill Jon is a New York Times best-selling author of six books, his most recent book hit number one on the Wall Street Journal, Finish, and he's got a brand new book out right about now called Soundtracks. He is an Inc. Magazine top 100 leadership speaker. He spoke 50 times a year to audiences around the world with up to 8,000 people at some of his events, and he's a huge social media presence. So I think you're going to love this conversation with Jon. I know a lot of you know him, if you don't, you're going to really enjoy it. Thank you to all of you who are new to listening as well.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Thanks for sharing the show. Head up, Jon, on social, and me on social and let us know you're listening and what you took away from this episode. And you guys know we have show notes, right? So you can go to careynieuwhof.com/episode408 and in there you also get some free transcripts, everything we talk about in this episode and a whole lot more. So, to all of you, whatever you're doing, spring is here. I'm out on my bike again, really enjoying that. So whether you're running, biking, in the yard, cooking, commuting, I don't know... What do you do when you listen to podcasts? Well, whatever you do really glad to be joining you today.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Did you know that ServeHQ has helped over 2,000 churches since 2015? And churches of every size have used them to streamline their volunteer onboarding process, run a digital or remote growth track and update their membership and assimilation experiences, and even codify their leadership development flow. ServeHQ helps churches by providing a powerful and simple to use online training experience, a new approach to digital messaging and an automated step-by-step followup tool. So imagine having one tool to onboard new volunteers automatically and get them ready to serve right away. They have a training library with over 800 video modules with quiz questions already present, and they're customizable for each one. You can engage your people with videos, gifs. Do you say gifs or jifs? Definitely gifs. Okay. Just so you know. Images, files and so much more. You can hold real-time chats and a safe accountable space, and you can do that for training course discussions, volunteer communication

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Carey Nieuwhof:

And right now you can save 10% off for life by using the code CAREY, C-A-R-E-Y @servehq.church. Learn more and start your 14 day free trial today. And let's talk about productivity, okay, specifically how to maximize it from your team, whether they work from home or in a brick and mortar office or both, and increasingly for a lot of us, it's both. For leaders, it means changing the lens with which you view and even measure your employees productivity. How do you track that? And for a lot of people, moving into where we're going in the post pandemic world, the world shows no signs of returning to how things have always been done. So now more than ever, productivity matters. And how do you do it well in a hybrid workforce? The key for you as a leader is to figure that out.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Thankfully, our friends at Belay, an incredible organization that has revolutionized productivity with their virtual assistant bookkeeping and social media strategist services, understand this. So they're offering a brand new resource, essential strategies to unleash your productivity today, to all of our podcast listeners. If you want to get your free guide, here's what you do. Go to belaysolutions.com/cnlp, that's Belay, B-E-L-A-Y, [solutions.com/cnlp](https://belaysolutions.com/cnlp). Well, guys, I am very excited to bring you today's conversation. So why don't we jump into it? Here is Jon Acuff.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Jon Acuff, welcome back. So good to have you, man. It's been a minute. Well, no, actually you interviewed me last time. That's what happened.

Jon Acuff:

Yeah, that's true. I interviewed you and Toni. So that hasn't been long. I haven't been on your show show in, I think, two or three years at this point.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's been awhile, but you weren't blacklisted, so that's good, so you can come back.

Jon Acuff:

No fallout.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wasn't like, when you say it that way you make it seem like, "Yeah, I haven't been on your show in two or three years." Are you sitting around going? "I wonder what I did. I wonder what I said."

Jon Acuff:

You told me I had to be as strong as Craig Groeschel. And I was like, "It's a weird condition. I'll start doing curls." And that's what I've been working on. And eventually I came to a spot where I was like, "I'm just going to wear black sweaters and nobody can tell what you look like. It's fine."

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's sort of my thing, right? Like dark colors, really, they just kind of hide the body.

Jon Acuff:

They're the best, they're the best. That's my jam, black sweater, black t-shirt... it's my summer winter outfit. That's it. If I could wear... and I went to an all-boys Catholic high school, and I hated that we had a uniform, and now as an adult, I'm like, "they're amazing." Some people that's their passion, like they're matching pocket squares. It's not my jam and that's fine.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. It's funny, you do... you have ended up in that black t-shirt, black sweater thing, haven't you? Was that an intentional decision?

Jon Acuff:

It was just, I don't... it's funny that we're talking today about a book about overthinking. I can overthink my wardrobe. It's a paradox of choice. If I have a thousand things to choose from, forget it. If I know tomorrow I got three different sweaters and I'm going to pick a sweater and I'm going to wear it, especially when it's cold. It takes 14 seconds, and I have other stuff that I'm really excited about, idea-wise, that I'd rather give all my creativity to. So it's more of a ... I have a limited amount of creative space in my head and I want to give it to the stuff that's really getting me fired up.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You eat the same thing for breakfast every day?

Jon Acuff:

Pretty much-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, me too.

Jon Acuff:

I run the same loop. I don't... there's my friends who were like, "Let's go drive somewhere to jog some new trail." I'm like, "No."

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's weird. Okay. I do the same thing with cycling. What my friends are like, "Why don't... why do you always do the same route?" It's like, "Because I don't have to think about it." And then I just get out.

Jon Acuff:

I use running to turn my brain off. Some people use exercise to turn the brain on, and the difference, and actually think this is a metaphor for the year we had last year... when you trail run, you have to think about every step. You can't tune out. Every step is thoughtful.

Carey Nieuwhof:

True.

Jon Acuff:

Last year was trail running. A lot of us had some road running years where we knew roughly what's going to happen. 2020 was trail running. 2021 is trail running. And that's part of why people are so exhausted. And so yeah, for me, I like road running, because I know, okay, if I need to work out a problem or a thought or a book chapter, I know this route, I can go and I'm good.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's the same thing. It's interesting, because I used to mountain bike... I still got it hanging in my garage, but I'm like, "Do you know how much focus mountain biking takes? Oh-"

Jon Acuff:

Like the mountain is trying to kill you. Like it is actively involved in your death. You have to go, "You almost got me." I drop but you almost got like, "That single track rock path almost got me." So yeah. I like to tune out on certain activities, because I'm so tuned in on other ones.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. Okay. Well, that's a really good pro tip right there. So try eating the same thing for breakfast, if that's your thing, or wearing similar or the same clothing. It really, to me, it's decision fatigue. It's one less decision I need to make.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So speaking of the craziness of the last 12, 14 months, I want to start here. We're going to get to your new book. I think it's fascinating. I have read it. It is just... I so admire your craft and what you do with your craft, but your world, like everybody else's, has got turned upside down. You went from speaking 50-ish, times a year, mostly to companies, occasionally to church or conference audiences, and all of a sudden you're grounded. And you and I connect all the time. We talk all the time. So I kind of walked through that year with you. You walk through it with me. But I would love for you to just talk about, publicly. What was that like for you? Because we all thought it was going to be a couple of months, right? I remember we're like, "Okay in August, we're back on the road, right?"

Jon Acuff:

Yeah. You and I talked in March, kind of in the middle, when it was first starting in, and we were kind of in the active... events are starting to cancel and we're like "Yeah, but we got some coming up." I mean, I sent a friend a text on March 15th that said, I think the first half of the year is going to be challenging, because I really thought by July, this will be a wrap, we'll be all... And then it just kept changing, kept changing, kept changing. So I went through phases like everybody else did, where it was, March and April were pretty disappointing, I felt pretty stuck, I felt like I was spinning, I didn't know what to do... I had... it's funny when I'm stressed out, I stop doing the things that relieve stress. That's one of the natural things that happens.

Jon Acuff:

You know the five things and you go, "I feel really stressed. I should stop doing those things." You go, "How is that?" Or I always tell people isolation is a snake that eats its own tail because people go, "I feel really lonely. I should sit at home alone and figure out why.", versus going out to your community. Isolation feeds on itself, and so I had some months of that, but then it was like, I kind of came to a place

the way, I said it was like, I can pine or I can plan. I can pine the old way, "Oh, I used to have all these. This is what life used to be shaped as." Or I can plan the new way, so I can go, "Hey Carey, I'm thinking about doing a podcast. Can you give me a couple of tips?"

Jon Acuff:

"Hey, Chris Zimmerman, I'm going to do a YouTube Channel. Hey, I'm going to do Speakers Bureau. Can I do virtual events from your studio?" So I started to kind of rebuild some stuff, and then it got exciting because I wrote a book about overthinking and then the entire world collectively overthought. And so prior to this year it was an epidemic. Now... I don't know what's beyond epidemic, but we all overthought this year, and so I was really like, "Wow, this is an interesting time to start to release a book about this topic because of what we're in the middle of." I think it's at an all time high overthinking. We're all stuck at home. We're guzzling negative news. I think it's a really good time to go, "Wait a second. It doesn't... you don't have to do that. It doesn't have to be this way. What if we learned to control our thoughts?"

Jon Acuff:

And so I try... I started to kind of shift towards that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You took, was it a month or six weeks off last summer? Remember, you had it off with the family... do you want to talk about... was that pre-planned... you just-

Jon Acuff:

No, not at all, dude. Everything got canceled, so my oldest daughter was supposed to march in the parade at Disney with her high school band. So that was one that bummed me out. My trips, they get canceled, I'm a grown adult. I go, "Yeah, it's a bummer. I would like to do that." We had an anniversary trip to Italy that we were like, "We'll move it."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, I remember that. Yeah, you guys, you and Jenny, and was it a big one? Was it 20 for you guys or...

Jon Acuff:

20 this year, and we were going last year because that's when it fell. And we were like, "We'll move it to March 2021", which that's not happening. But as an adult, you can handle that. I felt more sad for my kids and stuff... they got canceled. So we have Jenny's parents live in Blowing Rock, North Carolina, in the mountains, and they have a cottage. They have two places and they have this little cottage, and Jenny was like, "Well, let's go up there for spring break." And she... and Jenny said... Jenny is super, super smart and was like, "Hey, I think this is going to last 18 months." And I was like, "You mean 18 minutes." And she was like, "No, I think you should pack more than you think." And we all... me and my two kids were like, "Well, you don't need to pack much."

Jon Acuff:

Jenny was the only one who packed enough clothes. We get to the mountains to stay a week and we end up staying five and a half. And then we ended up going to... not going back to the mountains for two and a half. So I think, all in total, we spent like 10 weeks, in this mountain house kind of working on,

"Okay, what are we going to do? How do we..." And fortunately for me, somebody told me the phrase, Zoom class, like where you're part of the class that can actually work from home, and knowing that, you shouldn't condescend to people who can't. And so it gave us a sense of, okay, we can figure out how to do some of this from home. I mean, I can't do... live events are different obviously, but fortunately I had some space where I could do some stuff from home and kind of reinvent my career to some degree. And so that's what we worked on.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So let's talk about reinventing your career, because you launched a bunch of new stuff in the last... you didn't have any immediate pressure, but obviously you don't want to sit there wondering, "I wonder when I can get back on a plane again." Right? Which is still wobbly. I don't know, by the time this airs, but it's still wobbly when we're recording it. So let's talk about YouTube. Were you on YouTube prior to last summer?

Jon Acuff:

I had a page. So here's the thing I tell people. Ask yourself "what would have made this season easier?" And then go build that thing.

Jon Acuff:

So it's a really powerful question because... and you don't feel shame that you don't have the thing already. That's useless.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right.

Jon Acuff:

Okay. What would have made the season easier? So in March or April of 2020, I was like, "What would've made this season easier? If I had a really robust YouTube Channel where I could communicate with clients, where I had another revenue stream, that would make this easier. So, guess what? A year from now, I'm going to have that." And I think that's a huge question that we can ask. So it's the same of podcast. It's the same of writing a book. It's the same of a side hustle. You go, "Okay, right now I'm in this stressful situation. What's the thing I could build that would make this easier?"

Jon Acuff:

And then you go build that. So that's what I did with YouTube. I had a YouTube Channel. I put my flag in the ground, so to speak, but I had, like 1,100 subscribers and hadn't made a video in like four or five years. And so I was like, "You know what? I think it might be time to meet people online, like these moving pictures." I was, I think, one of the... and I'm going to write about this at some point, one of the hardest things about learning something new is the perceived shame that you don't already know it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What do you mean?

Jon Acuff:

And so, you're afraid to ask the questions, the stupid questions. So I think it's really valuable to get into a community where you can say, "I don't know this thing, that it seems like everybody else knows. Can you help me?" Like when you bump into somebody where, if you're a podcast person and you're going to start a podcast and you get some sarcastic person, you go, "Hey, I don't understand what Apple reviews are, or I don't..." And they shame you? Forget it. You're going to shut down the learning. You need people around you that when you go, "I don't even know how to upload my thumbnail. They're like, "Oh, no problem. I didn't know either when I started, let me show you." And so I think you have to find people like that, and you have to be willing to kind of go do the new stuff and be an amateur as it were.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Jon, I'm so glad you raised that about YouTube because you got me thinking like... a couple of years ago, when you starting over again solo, I remember we talked about email lists, and you're like, "I never took my email list very seriously" and I said I didn't want it, and then you kind of had to start from scratch again. Speaking of that space... because there's a lot of people... we're going to talk about podcasting and your new book and everything, but there's a lot of people who are like, "You know what? The podcasting ship sailed a long time ago. I kind of missed that boat. I haven't... yeah, I'm not on YouTube now either, so if I was you John, I would've gone last summer, but I didn't go last summer, so I can't go now. And I never built an email list and I know I have to do it."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Because you, you do that. You're just like, "Okay, I'm not in this space when I should be, but now I'm going to go in this space."

Carey Nieuwhof:

So what... talk about that.

Jon Acuff:

Well, I mean, I admit it's frustrating. It's frustrating to me that I had a blog in 2001 and then I took eight... seven years off. What could I have done in that seven years? But there's no good that comes out of kind of trying to relive or change those seven years. It just... I get stuck and it's kind of like saying, "I would love to go to Mars, but like Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos are already kind of interested in Mars. So like Mars is already full." There's not too many podcasts, there's not too many books, so I just have to... the humbling thing for me is if you've got some, if you've established one part of your life, you then have to go be in an amateur in another and you forgot what that's like.

Jon Acuff:

I keep telling people, one of my mottos is 'be a tourist', because you need a new mindset to do something new, and a tourist, they go to a city and they ask lots of questions. They're not embarrassed. When I meet a tourist in downtown Nashville, they don't go, "I feel terrible, but I don't know where the hotel is." He goes, "Hey, do you know where that bar is?" I go, "Yeah, yeah, it's right over there." They ask lots of questions. They don't pretend to be experts. You don't get to learn if you're busy pretending. And so I have to constantly remind myself of that, because I'd rather look like an expert. I like knowing what to do. I love being on stage and knowing, "Here's the market I'm going to hit, here's the joke I'm going to tell, here's this thing I'm going to flip." That's fun to me, but I get really stagnant. I've got this

idea that I'm playing around with where, if you gain... say you gain, a pound is what? 12 ounces? Isn't that a pound?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Mm-hmm.

Carey Nieuwhof:

16, 12... Toni knows all that stuff, and she's not here right now.

Jon Acuff:

So, I think that's right. So, if a pound is 16 ounces-

Speaker 3:

Close.

Jon Acuff:

... and you gain... Is it 16 ounces? You're-

Carey Nieuwhof:

I think it's 16.

Jon Acuff:

Are we on the metric system?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, we are. But we do... so Canadian, and I have to... I have a bone to pick with you at the end of the show.

Jon Acuff:

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But Canadian, all right? You know where it's coming, but yeah...

Jon Acuff:

Let's say you gain half a pound a month.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Got it.

Jon Acuff:

You barely notice it. You barely notice it. So, you do that for a year, you gain six pounds, but you do that for 10 years, you gain 60 pounds, and that's where you wake up and go, "Oh my gosh." The same exact

thing happens in every other facet of life. So you take six ounces or half a pound off a technology, you go, "You know what? I'm not going to do that thing, I'm not going to do that thing, I'm not going to do that thing." You wake up 10 years in and you have 60 pounds of technological irrelevance. So you don't know how to use all the platforms, you don't know how to do all this stuff, and it's hard to jump back into it, in the same way that if you're 100 pounds, 200 pounds overweight, it's harder to run. There's a bigger challenge. And so for me, I have to remind myself it's okay that it's a challenge, it's okay that I don't know YouTube. I can't compare myself to the person that has 10 million people. They're probably not amazing at writing books. And then the other thing you do is, you realize you have certain strengths and you try to make the medium obey those strengths, or you try to kind of figure out, "Okay, where... which things work for me?" I'm not a great visual storyteller, I'm just not. It's not my gift, it's not my craft, it's not what I do. Carlos Whitaker, amazing visual storyteller.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, truth.

Jon Acuff:

He thinks in moving pictures. I don't think that way. I write books. I'm really good at writing books, and that's what I feel comfortable with, that's what I love to do.

Jon Acuff:

Can I figure out how to make YouTube kind of fit my strengths? I think I can. Will I quit YouTube if I think that I have to be as good a storyteller as Carlos, or as good a community guy as Mr. Beast or whatever it is? I will. So you have to kind of figure out, "Where's my spot in this? Where's the things I can grow?" But where's the things that I just need to admit that I'm never going to be the guy that's like, "I want a drone, I want four cameras..." That amount of technology overwhelms and cripples my creativity. It unleashes other people. For me, it's acrippler. I don't need to do it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, there's two things there I just want to pull out. Number one, as a guy in your 40s, you're always reinventing, right? So you have older leaders or people who are not 22 going, "Yeah, okay, good, if Jon can reinvent, I can reinvent. That's a good thing."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Second thing-

Jon Acuff:

It's very gray. It's very gray.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But the other thing is, if you are a young leader, it's like, things are going to keep changing on you. Right now you have the digital native technology advantage because you grew up with it. It's ubiquitous. You know how to use it. But that's going to change, because the kids are going to come along and they're going to learn some new stuff. What... I got to ask you, because way more listeners are online now than they were 12 months ago at this point, what have you learned on YouTube? What is the value of YouTube for you, and what is it accomplishing for the people that you want to serve or reach?

Jon Acuff:

It's a completely different audience. You can see that where, it's humbling for me because I have 300,000 Twitter followers, I'll tweet a link to a video and it'll get 40 views. I don't care who you are. That is a punch in the stomach. That's just, I mean, if you were a baseball player and you hit the ball 40 times for every 300,000 at bats, they wouldn't bring you back. So, but it's a different audience. It's a completely different planet. They want completely different things. So, I like it that it lets me flex my creative muscle. I like it that it forces me to learn a new medium. I like it that it gives me a chance to practice an idea, to get an idea out there and to shape it and to change it.

Jon Acuff:

And I just, there's so many people that are like, "Oh, I've kind of been waiting over at YouTube for you to dip your toe in." I couldn't convince him to go to Twitter. I couldn't convince them to go to Instagram. That's their spot. So, one of my big words for the year is serve, so if I'm going to serve people, I have to say, it's not like it's this obscure platform either. It's not like, you're... right? It's not like right now you're like, "Jon, you're really big on like Bulgarian hologram technology." I'm like, "I am, I... there's a guy that has a castle in Bulgaria and we have a server." And I'm ahead of it, I'm like, "Dude, it's YouTube." It's almost like you're telling me, "Jon, you're really big on the telephone." I'm like, "I am, Carey. You call up the operator, you get right through to somebody." So, hopefully every leader who's listening to this and feels like it's too late, dude, I'm talking about my new YouTube Channel and it is 2021, jump in, it's not too late. If it's not too late for me, it's not too late for you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Ah, that's good news. What got you the most traction out of the gate? Was it your email list? Was it Instagram or how did you... because you've got a decent following now on YouTube... so what were your momentum sparks on that one?

Jon Acuff:

I mean, email lists definitely. When I would email out, "Hey, here's a..." Now what I had to be careful about with not just doing emails for every video, because that's not what people signed up to my email list for. That's the other thing, is that, when you start something new, you have to figure out, "Do I bring a new channel to do it? Do I introduce it slowly?"

Jon Acuff:

The reason I retired stuff Christians like was I wasn't going to jam leadership ideas onto that site, because that wasn't the relationship I had established with people. And so I had to be careful there. And then for me, recognizing moments and then creating content around the moment. So one of my bigger videos, which again is not massive, but for me it was, was about Zoom.

PART 1 OF 4 ENDS [00:23:04]

Jon Acuff:

Hey, here are the Zoom habits that are terrible. It was of a moment in a moment, and I felt like that one did well because everybody was Zooming. Then another one was, just being honest. So I said, "Here's how much I made on my first book."

Carey Nieuwhof:

And you had your 77 cent YouTube revenue check. I remember that one. That was fun.

Jon Acuff:

Yeah. How much have I made on YouTube? I like to share... I realized that I can get really isolated from the people I'm trying to serve when I try to think of what it should be to be an author, or a leader, or influencer. I start playing a role, and that's a constant never-ending temptation for me.

Jon Acuff:

I have to find ways to continually break the fourth wall and go, "Yeah, here's this thing that was really hard. Here's this thing I messed up, here's this..." I enjoy that once I do it. If I don't do it, my persona calcifies, and I end up playing a role, and it's fake, and my wife is like, "Ugh, that content was fake." It just doesn't go well.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, podcasting is also new for you, you've got a brand new podcast that just came out and it was your second iteration into podcasting too, right? Do you want to unpack that a little bit?

Jon Acuff:

I had two and a half years off between episodes, just to really think it out. I had a big episode coming. Yeah, dude. I did. Yeah. Let's break the fourth wall. My first eight episodes were super lazy, because I went in with an ego and was like, "I'm Jon Acuff. I don't have to put work into this! I've got an email list. I've got Instagram. I'm Jon Acuff!" I didn't work at it, I just phoned it in and hoped that my audience, my influence, whatever, would carry the day and that's garbage.

Jon Acuff:

This one, I was like, "I've got to put hours to it. I've got to write questions. I've got to write scripts. I've got to hire people. I've got to work with sponsors. I'm going to do all the work that goes behind the thing to make the thing good, versus just thinking I can just coast. That, to me, on the back end, is the main difference.

Jon Acuff:

On the front end, the main difference is, I said, "It's going to be about goals. I'm a goal nerd, it's what I care about, it's what I talk about, it's what I do in my own life. So the podcast is, All It Takes Is A Goal, because I really believe in the power of goals, and that's what I want to help people with, versus going, "It's everything, it's some of this, it's some of that!"

Jon Acuff:

A lot of times when you won't do the work of figuring out what you're doing, it's like you're Walmart if the shelves changed every day. People would hate Walmart if every time they came in, the shelves are different, or every time you went to Target, they're like, "Eh, we just completely mixed it up." You'd be like, "But I don't know what I'm getting." You haven't set an expectation."

Jon Acuff:

Now for me, I would say to all your leaders listening, that doesn't mean you have to be hyper, hyper niche. There's this whole mentality of like, "You've got to find that you collect New Zealand stamps from the 1940s, and then do your podcast on that only! You've only got to serve the New Zealand stamp population of 1940! You've got to do that."

Jon Acuff:

That's not how I'm wired. I like a lot of different things. My approach is find a big umbrella, goals, and write under that, and talk to that, and be consistent to that. You have to constantly say, "How does this honor the topic? How does this honor the topic?" You have to keep pulling it back to that, but at the same time, you can't limit yourself creatively on the front end and go, "I've got to find my razor thin niche and just hope that I have enough passion to sustain it over a year, over two years, over three years."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Hmm. I want to ask you one more question about podcasting. I just want to say publicly, and you've heard this and I've told so many people this privately, you gave me the best single piece of advice I think I've ever had on podcasting in six years of podcasting, which was, when the show started to take off, you and I were backstage somewhere, and I'm like, "Jon, I'm getting pitched. Publishers are sending me books, people now want to be on at the beginning." You're begging your cat to be on, all that stuff.

Jon Acuff:

You're like, "It's only Episode Four of you coming on. Let's do another one!"

Carey Nieuwhof:

"Yeah, yeah. You can do another one." Right? I remember you saying to me, "It's your show. Do what you want. What interests you?" I have used that as a filter, and so it's this really strange, eclectic mix of guests, but I'm interested in every episode.

Jon Acuff:

You know where that came from? I got the credit.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Mm-mm (negative).

Jon Acuff:

Brian Koppelman from the Brian podcast.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It was Brian.

Jon Acuff:

I asked him about how he picks his guests, and he's like, "One time I made a mistake. I let somebody pressure me into having a guest on, a publisher or whatever that I didn't really care about. Now I only

interview people that I'm deeply, honestly interested in." I think that comes through in the interviews. Yeah, I was passing on that info, but I think...

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well thank you Brian Koppelman and Jon Acuff.

Jon Acuff:

I've already turned people down. I've only had a couple episodes, but I've been asked a couple of times. I don't like doing it. I hate telling people no, but I also don't want to be like, "This is my friend. They've got a new book about cats. Here's their cat book." I don't know how that relates to goals, but cats, "Ugh." You can tell when somebody is doing that, it's not as fun.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It is hard, because you disappoint people, you disappoint a lot of people in the process, and it's never gets easy.

Jon Acuff:

I think about that a lot. You're only going to disappoint more people the more successful you are. If your goal is to disappoint less people, don't ever create anything; don't ever build anything; don't ever grow anything; don't ever get a platform. It's part of the price of admission. The more successful you get at sharing an idea, the more chances you have to disappoint people, and I don't mean that in a negative way. That's just more people know about you. If only 10 people know about you, only one's going to ask you to do something. If a hundred people know about you, statistically 10 are going to ask you, and you have to figure out, "Okay, how do I say no to this? How do I be kind, but at the same time have boundaries?"

Carey Nieuwhof:

So speaking of Koppelman, his friendship and interviews with Seth Godin are some of my favorite. Those two go deep. Your podcast is brand new. I haven't listened ahead, because you've released one episode in the preview, but it feels like you've gone almost like a Seth Godin format, where it seems a little bit scripted, well-produced. Scripted, not in a stilted way, but Seth is calorie dense. I love Akimbo. He is so good at what he does, and he's been on the show as well. We'll link to that episode.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Tell me about the format you chose and why you picked it. Why that format? Because now you've got social, you've got your blog, you've got your email list, you've got YouTube, and everyone's into content these days, so I'm just picking this apart.

Jon Acuff:

Yeah. I looked at what I feel good at. I'm not a great interviewer, and I think I'll get better. I think the format's going to be three or four episodes, where it's 15 to 20 minutes of me riffing. Then an interview that I feel like is interesting.

Jon Acuff:

I interviewed this woman, Colleen Barry, for an episode that's coming up in a couple of weeks. She's in my new book, Soundtracks, and she's in the first chapter. She was a receptionist at a real estate company. She lost her job. She could have really easily gotten stuck in resentment, and instead she changed her mindset, and now she's the CEO. I wanted to talk to her, because I had interviewed her for the book and I was like, "Oh, if I ever have a podcast..."

Jon Acuff:

That interview was amazing because we got to go back and forth on "What are you doing?" One of my favorite things she said was, "The best productivity app that's ever been designed, is the timer on your phone." I one hundred percent agree. To set the timer, do the thing for half an hour, clear everything else. I loved how she said that.

Jon Acuff:

That's the format. Where I'll end up, because you know how it is, that's the challenges you have to do. You do your best, but you know you're not going to love the first episodes as much as a year from now, or two years from now. That's just part of growth. Your first sermon isn't great. It shouldn't be. You don't want to peak, you hopefully will get better.

Jon Acuff:

The first couple episodes, I wrote out a script, I followed it, and I've really thought through the idea. Now what I'm realizing is, the best way to do it is, I recorded one today, I write out an idea, but I leave space for new stuff to happen, which is the same way I do a speech.

Jon Acuff:

My favorite parts of a speech are, I know it 90%, and that 10% that happens in the moment is magic for me and the audience. So, I want to have my podcast be like that, where I know I'm going to teach you this thing. I'm going to teach you how to grade the year on a curve, because that's important. Okay, so how do we do that? Then I'm going to leave space for new ideas to bubble up because that's how I like to think.

Jon Acuff:

I like to think quick and go, "Oh, this idea that Carey said, is related to this other idea. And here's something I heard Reggie said, and here's something my wife said." I put that in the book. My favorite definition of creativity is Dorothy Parker, who said, "Creativity is a wild mind and a disciplined eye."

Jon Acuff:

I love that because if I'll feed myself the wildness, I can have the discipline of my eye to connect things that aren't connected. If I won't over-script the podcast, new stuff can happen in the moment. I think listeners can tell, and go, "Oh yeah, he forgot he knew that story and he just added it in and it fit. That's really fun. Okay." I want to listen to more of that. That's how I'm thinking about it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

One of the things I really admire about you, and you and I've talked about that, is just how hard you work at your craft. Because we spent so much time together, I see you practicing, I see you rehearsing a line. Sometimes I'll see 10 iterations of a talk, or a riff, or a bit, and yet you're always reinventing

yourself. For a lot of leaders, most of the leaders listening to this show, are creating content of some kind; some in the church world, some in the business world, some in the online marketing world, et cetera, et cetera.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Can you talk about that? When I hear you describing your podcast, I'm like, "Oh, you followed Koppelman's advice." You're doing something you're actually interested in. You're like, "Oh yeah. She's not a well-known artist, nobody would know her name, but she's going to be one of my first guests because she just has a fascinating story and I'm interested in it. She was in my book, and it kind of shows up."

Carey Nieuwhof:

You're always reinventing, and yet the stuff that you own, you're always polishing. Is there a tension in that? I don't know what the question is, Jon, but do you see? It's a fun combo, dude.

Jon Acuff:

Yeah, totally. I heard somebody say once, it's funny, this is the wild mind, we went to Vietnam. The readers of my blog had raised money to build two kindergartens in Vietnam, which was crazy. We went there and this guy that was on the trip with us, was like, "Vietnam is like an accordion, in that the communism expands and then it constricts. The country has this..." So I love, not from a political standpoint, I love that idea of an accordion. So for me, it's like I expand an idea, and then I constrict it. I'm trying to concentrate it. I just did the Finish course. The first time I did a Finish course there were 30 ideas, 30 lessons, 30 lessons, and it was too much!

Jon Acuff:

I concentrated it down to six. I like to take the idea, and then I'm work shopping it, I'm work shopping, I'm work shopping and going like, "This is better, this is funny, this is interesting." But a lot of that starts with what I call "four year ideas", where an idea that I'm so excited, that if you came to my house, I wouldn't let you get past the front door before I told you. My wife's like, "Whoa, let them take the coat off." I'm like, "No, you've got to hear this thing." Then I'll collect them, and I'll riff on them, and I'll touch them multiple times.

Jon Acuff:

A four-year idea for me right now... An engineer that I meet with every other week named William, good friend of mine, was telling me that one of the engineers that reports to him was at Georgia Tech, and they had a contest. The professor said, "You have to sort these marbles as fast as you can, different sizes, different colors, whatever, using gravity as the power, a top-bottom thing, with these pieces."

Jon Acuff:

Everybody built these complicated shoots and there was all this scoring system. This one dude walked in with a tube and a plate that went inside the tube. So a horizontal plate. When the professor started the timer, he dumped all his marbles in the top, removed the plate, they all fell down in 0.01 seconds. He won the contest because he realized the greatest score maximizer was speed. The rest of the stuff didn't matter. Everybody was frustrated, but I'll remember that idea and I'll capture it and go, "If I ever needed an illustration of, do you know the rubric? Have you even checked what you're scored on?"

Jon Acuff:

Because I guarantee there are leaders right now that are doing 10 things, and there are two that actually serve people. There are two that people actually care about, and they feel stressed. If they retired the eight, and said, "Oh man, people care more about how I interact with them in the lobby, than that I have a perfect phrase in my speech. Why don't I put some more time into my lobby, versus I've got to find some amazing illustration and look like a certain type of person on stage?"

Jon Acuff:

I'll collect that, and then I'll figure out a spot for it, and then I'll shape it. If I start to get feedback or somebody goes...

Jon Acuff:

Another example, I was telling a story about, I read an article in the New York Times that asked why didn't Kodak create Instagram? Nick Felton wrote this article. They asked, why didn't Polaroid? The whole point of the article was, because in their culture, a corporate culture like that, no one could walk in and go, "Hey, I got this crazy idea," because they already had success.

Jon Acuff:

Then I go, "I'm going to add to that there's a great danger when you move from innovation mode to protection mode. Oh! Innovation to protection, that's a thing that happens! You start to protect the thing that's already been built. I tell that story on stage, a woman comes up to me and goes, "Hey, I did my thesis in college on how Kodak failed that way. Do you know what they invested in during the digital revolution?" I'm like, "I don't." She said, "Paper quality."

Jon Acuff:

In a time where people were saying, we're going to spend less money, we're going to do less photos printed out, they're like, "What if the paper is really expensive though?" So, I'm like, those are magnet ideas that I'm gathering other pieces on and I'm kind of using them and changing them. Yeah, that to me is where the craft part is.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You see? Okay. You know what I think is underneath this, which I think is so fascinating, a lot of us, and the disruption last year really threw this into the spotlight, we all had our rhythms, right? So you're a public speaker. You get paid good money. When you go to Microsoft, or you go to Boeing, or wherever you happen to be speaking at Dell, you better deliver, dude. You're not experimenting on stage. Okay? Maybe you get 5% experiment. Maybe you get 5% experiment, maybe 2% experiment, but you're not experimenting on stage.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Your whole model, and I'm glad we chased this down, this is probably what the price of admission, your whole model gets blown up. You can't do it. But I think what's fascinating for a lot of us who produce content, is we are so used to doing all the prep in the background; work, work, work, work, work, work, work, work, work, polish, polish, polish, present publicly.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You're doing the talk. You're doing the vision night. You're doing the fundraising pitch. You're doing the sermon, you're doing the book, or whatever. I think what's true about the internet is no, you're experimenting in real time. First iteration of the podcast failed. All right, notice that. Or, you didn't like it. Now we're coming back. Didn't like the way I did the finish course the first time, not all is lost. It's not like courses are bad and the finish course is bad. No, I'll make it better.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I wonder if that's the new paradigm where we're all experimenting. The joke I have with my staff is the internet doesn't lie. I keep working on stuff that I think is brilliant, and the internet is like, "Nope." Then sometimes I riff something off, and the Internet's like, Yay! Up vote, up vote, up vote. You learn from that and then you move on, you do your next product. There's something to that, isn't there, in the moment we're in?

Jon Acuff:

Yeah. That reminds me of Tim Ferriss interviewing Seinfeld. I don't know if you heard that?

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's a great interview.

Jon Acuff:

It's amazing. But remember he says, Tim Ferriss says to him, "Once you get off stage, do you get feedback from other comedians?? And he says, "Why?? He said, "I already got the feedback I needed, the audience." That's the only feedback that matters.

Jon Acuff:

It's the same thing where, that's why I will workshop things where I'll do an Instagram live. It'll be three minutes, and it'll be like, "Hey, here's an idea." Then that idea, new stuff will happen, I'll go shape that into a YouTube video. Then if that goes really well, guess what? I'm going to bring that into a speech. If that goes really well, guess what? I'm going to bring that into a book.

Jon Acuff:

So, that's where it's an idea funnel. If you're on Instagram live and you're like, "Oh, I didn't like that. It wasn't worth the money." Full refund, it costs you \$0. If I see people go, "Oh, that phrase or that idea," or if I feel it was the right phrase, then I'll change it and then I'll add it to YouTube and then I'll actually write it, and then it'll become a podcast.

Jon Acuff:

I recorded a podcast episode today that started as an email and a YouTube video. I was like, "Oh man, there's something here that I'm curious about." So yeah, I think that's one of the lies you have to get over is, the minute an idea's out, it's old. That's not true. The minute an idea is out, it's beginning. It's entered the phase of iteration and change and growth and evolution.

Jon Acuff:

And that's a hard one for me, because I'm a new idea guy. I love new ideas. It's not easy for me to go shape and hone. But when I do, they're so much better, they are so much...

Jon Acuff:

I'm looking at the windows that I stare out every day, and I've got an idea right here. Let's see, I'll pull it off, says it's from 8/27. It says, "ask for more". I know that I'm going to sit with that, because I realize when I'm negotiating, when I'm doing things, ask for more, there's always more. I've never had somebody respond to me, "You're so greedy. I can't believe you asked...", but that's the fear. I have to be reminded to do that. Probably what I'm going to do... I got this idea where I have one of those signs where you can put like a letter board sign on. I'm going to stand out in my backyard, holding that up, John Cusack, say anything style, have my wife take a photo and that'll be an Instagram post. Then I'll get to write, "What are the things you wish you could remind yourself about yourself?" That's a cool concept.

Jon Acuff:

I haven't done it yet, but it's in the funnel, and I know it's coming, and I'm going to do it at some point. One of my favorite things, Al Andrews, who you should a hundred percent have on your podcast.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay, noted.

Jon Acuff:

Al Andrews said to me, his background, he's a counselor, he was in Nashville forever and realized most of his patients were musicians and they couldn't afford it. He went to every major label in town and said, "You're spending millions of dollars to blow up these people. And then their lives fall apart. Let me be a safe place for them to protect their heart." Now he's got, and they all sponsor him, Sony, Christian, secular labels.

Jon Acuff:

Suddenly one day, he was like, "Jon, is it ever hard for you to have an idea and not share it immediately?" I was like, "Yeah, it's like which platform?" He was like, "Well, right now you've got a keg party lifestyle with your ideas. People are just coming in and getting content, content content." He said, "You need some wine ideas. You need some ideas you take and put on a shelf behind you for a year, for two years, that you only talk about with friends, so they can actually turn into something that's magical and meaningful."

Jon Acuff:

That idea of wine ideas, of knowing yes, some ideas, I get them right out, but some ideas, I go, "Okay, I can put that on a shelf. I'm going to add a bunch of ideas. I'm going to let it grow. I'm going to let it age in a way. Then when I do it, it's going to be awesome. But I'm going to give it time to kind of turn into the idea it needs to be."

Carey Nieuwhof:

How do you collect and keep those ideas? Just real practical question.

Jon Acuff:

Yeah. Right now, what I'm doing is I'm doing 90 days of bullet journal. So I've never really done bullet journaling. When people hear that they, if they know what that is, they think of the most complicated

ornate version you see on Pinterest or Instagram, where you're using felt tip pens from Japan, and you're doing rainbows. Forget it, dude.

Jon Acuff:

Mine is, I use a blue pen and I write stuff down. Right now I have a couple pages that I write ideas on because the problem is I have probably 20,000 ideas right back there in notebooks that are gone forever. They might as well be gone forever, because I'll never...

Carey Nieuwhof:

Because, you're not going to go back. It's like, "Oh yeah. August 2014." Yeah.

Jon Acuff:

Now, I collect them and now I'm figuring out a process to actually touch them again to say, where does this go? Then the other thing, I have pages right now that I'm like, "Okay, these are my pages of ideas." One of the ideas that actually summarizes the way I'm thinking about ideas, says this, "How many acorns become full blown trees? That's what happens to most ideas, figure out the math."

Jon Acuff:

One day I'm walking down the street, I'm seeing thousands, and thousands, and thousands of acorns. They're not all going to become 40 foot oak trees; and that's not failure. So what if I was able to say, "Yeah, I'm going to collect more than I use." It's not a one-to-one. Can you imagine if I had to produce every idea? Man, the pressure.

Jon Acuff:

I'm going to do an idea, probably an article, maybe a podcast, where I'm like, "No, 1% become trees." What if, let's double it, let's get you to 2% ideas shipped, as Seth Godin would say, 2% produced, because they're not all supposed to be produced, and that's not failure.

Jon Acuff:

Sometimes when people say, "I've got to come up with an idea system," they think the system is going to produce every idea they do. It's not supposed to. You're supposed to have a couple ideas that you add some other cool ideas to. I do a book every two years. I do a couple of speeches a year. I do some Instagram, I do some YouTube, but I have way more ideas than I'll ever publish. What I've learned is, same with my to-do list, whenever I feel failure about my to-do list, I tell myself, "That's not failure, that just means my imagination is bigger than my calendar." And that's dope.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That is dope, yeah.

Jon Acuff:

That is a dope statement. My imagination will always crush space and time. My imagination is always bigger than 24... 24 hours, that's a joke! My imagination of what I can create in 24 hours is way bigger than what I can execute in 24 hours. That's not failure, that's a gift. And I accept that gift and I'm going to make the most of it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It almost feels to me, and tell me if I got this wrong because I'm working on some new content that I want to release later this year, about the new content creation cycle. I was in that mode for a long time. You go do your homework, you study, maybe you bounce it off a team, and then you go and deliver the talk. All right? That's what you do.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It almost feels like you've got multiple canvases to paint on. You've got Twitter, you've got Instagram, you've got YouTube. You've got your podcast now, and then also like, "I'm going to go experiment over there, and let's see what happens. Oh, nothing. Okay. All right. Well, let's try it over on Instagram. Nah, nothing. Put it on Twitter, 2000 likes." It's like, "Ooh, what did I change? What did I do?" It's almost like a canvas you can paint on; you plant a whole lot of oaks and see which ones grow up?

PART 2 OF 4 ENDS [00:46:04]

Jon Acuff:

100%. And for me, I asked yesterday, "Essentially, is it ever hard for you to not just be hot or cold with ideas or hot or cold with goals. You're all in or you're all out." And so 250 people respond, 93% say, "They're all in." And some of them shared gifts, some of them share ideas. Cool, so now when I go and write about that, I can say, "I asked people and 300 people said this." So now I've got a community example, same with the way I write books is now I'll do a big challenge in September that's free and I'll have 5,000 people try it and I'll share the ideas and they'll tell me which ones work and which ones don't and I'll get real examples so that when I write a book, I have those examples and I could say, "Here's how somebody did it."

Jon Acuff:

I mean, you read Soundtracks. It's full of real people.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's so well done.

Jon Acuff:

And that's where it's from. And so, yeah, I kind of look at it that way. And then the other thing is I go, you can experiment on Instagram and Twitter because it goes away. You can do an Instagram live and it goes away. YouTube's a different thing. So I understand, I'm not going to do a ton of experiments on YouTube because it's going to be a video that's there. I'm going to do some that might turn into something bigger. It might turn into a book, it might turn into a speech, but I know that on Twitter, on Instagram live I can figure it out and then I'm an audio processor so it's easy for me to go, "Oh, Hey, here's an idea that shows up."

Jon Acuff:

I like talking my way into a situation. It's fun, which is why I don't want my podcast to be super scripted because I'll miss the fun examples that my brain goes, "What about this? What about this?" And so, yeah, but I see it as it's not super linear. It's definitely more, "Let me try this idea here. Let me tweak it. Let me try this idea over here. Let me tweak it. Wow. A bunch of people posted that I didn't even..."

That's the problem. We are the worst judges of our own ideas. Like you're so close to the idea, you can't tell what it is. And so I need other people to say that... Like my most successful, as far as like viral idea was Jesus' joke where, which I wrote for stuff, Christians like that was a throwaway post in a week with 10 other posts.

Jon Acuff:

I didn't think twice about that idea. It's like somebody sent me that phrase yesterday. So nine years later or whatever it is, people are still using that. And in vernacular, I didn't... Same with Jon Bon Jovi didn't want Living On A Prayer on his album because he's like, "It's a cheesy song." You can go through everybody who's had a big hit, rarely do they go, "I knew the second we did it it was going to be massive," and then the public responded the exact... there's a reason 60 publishers rejected the help. They weren't 60 idiots. It's just hard to see what's going to be good sometimes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Or the Queen's Gambit. Another great example.

Jon Acuff:

You just have to know that and be able to roll with it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So I got to say, we're going to morph to Soundtracks because I think there's some great stuff there. But this is a bridging question between creativity content, the writing process and your new book. As a writer myself, this simple phrase, maybe just drop the book and in a good way, like, Oh crap, he's such a good writer. And it's so simple. I could have pulled many of them, but this one is so simple. I wasn't a tech pioneer because I didn't own enough hoodies, but I was way ahead of the curve. I just thought that was so clever. And because there was so much in there, right? Like obviously if you've been to Silicon Valley, you see all the guys wandering around in hoodies, it's like, "Ah, okay. So you've got a cultural idiom and a couple of people are going to get that joke and it was kind of funny and yet it wasn't your main point, but it came in there."

Carey Nieuwhof:

How do you end up with sentences like that? Because your books are full of them. I asked Seth Goden this question when he was on, because you guys, when you're done, like when we're riffing like this, you're all over the place, just having a great convo, but like when you're delivering in a talk, when you're writing in a book, there's really no throw-away sentences. There's a lot of calories and a lot of puns per minute and I wonder how you do that. How are you honing that?

Jon Acuff:

I write a lot of bad sentences first, like a lot of... I write in layers where I write. I just try to get the idea. The words are wrong. First layer idea. I just want to communicate the idea. Nobody's seeing that. Second layer, I'm like, "Okay, how do I make it more positive?" My first draft is often melancholy. I have Counting Crows syndrome where it's first draft, little melancholy. I add some positivity in the second layer. Third layer, I'm like, okay, where does this help somebody? Because my stuff is designed to help people. I'm not writing a diary. I want people to go, "That helped me. I use that on a Tuesday." And then

the fourth layer is I go, "Okay, where's some humor. Where can I put some amplifying humor, not distracting humor?"

Jon Acuff:

Distracting humor takes you away from the main point and it's not worth the cost. Amplifying humor takes the main point and adds a little bit of seasoning, adds a little bit of flavor to what you're doing. And so that's kind of the layers I use. And then I try to make sure, like you said, that it's super concentrated, that every line earns its keep. If I take a sidetrack, it's worth the sidetrack. I kind of think about in a speech. Like I do this joke about Dr. Dre. So I tell this story about Bose. You've heard me do it before where we had a headstart in headphones. We didn't listen to customers who wanted colors and designs and Dr. Dre and Beats did and they ate our lunch.

Jon Acuff:

And so then I tell a story and then I say, almost under my breath, "We broke the first rule of electronics. We forgot about Dre." And that's funny to 40% of the audience. The rest of the audience, it didn't cost them anything. It was two seconds. So it didn't distract them so much that they are like, "I didn't get it." And it's the juxtaposition of the two things. We broke the first rule of electronics. "Oh, he's about to say something really serious." The first rule of electronics, we forgot about Dre. Forgot about Dre is a rap lyric from Dr. Dre and Eminem so the people that get it feel validated because like, "Oh," and then they're often in a corporate structure. They're not expecting a Dr. Dre, Eminem reference So they're like "What?" And so like stuff like that, I love that back and forth.

Jon Acuff:

And I love to serve the audience that way. Because again, it's not like that's a super obscure reference, but it's obscure enough that the people that get it love it. And the people that miss it aren't hurt. They don't feel like you've talked down to them. You haven't left them out of something. And so that's one of the tensions I'm always going back and forth on when it comes to how I structure a sentence, how I have a line, the tension I'm pulling. That's what I'm thinking about.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's uniquely your voice as your books tend to be, but you listen to editors. I seem to remember, tell me if I got the facts wrong, but with Finish, didn't go from 80,000 words down to 38,000 words or something?

Jon Acuff:

There's no explanation. Very little handholding and the same with Soundtracks. I changed to a new publisher. I went from Penguin to Baker and you're always nervous when you change publishers because editor relationships and Brian Voss who edited the book was fantastic and challenged me and pushed me. And so, yeah, I think you always listen to editors, you always see what they're like. And a lot of the time they're taking out stuff that you're like, "Yeah. I knew. I tried to slide it by them because I wanted to do it because it was fun to write." But it's not the right thing. And so I feel like the editors always make what I'm doing so much better.

Carey Nieuwhof:

How do you not let your ego get in the way? How do you not be like, "I'm Jon Acuff. I've got multiple New York Times bestsellers. You're telling me I need to cut this stuff?" There are a lot of people who have not accomplished what you've accomplished, who would definitely pull that card and go, "Listen, I've been doing this for 15 years. Like leave me alone."

Jon Acuff:

Yeah. But I did that with the podcast. So like I said my first podcast, I pulled the ego card. It went very poorly. Like the times I play the ego card, it sucks. And I try to remember that. And then also like, Brian Koppleman said it, Jerry Seinfeld said it, like, "Give it 24 hours. Like especially something new you've created. Don't get feedback on it for the first 24 hours." I can't let my wife read something new that I've written in the first 24 hours. So a lot of times I'll have to sit on the edits. I'll have to decide is it something worth fighting for? Are they not seeing something that I really believe in and I'm going to show them how much I care? A lot of times an editor will go along with you if they know that you go, "No, no, no, no, no. Here are the five reasons I did that. I know this is about my audience."

Jon Acuff:

And like, if you're putting in the work and editor goes, "Yeah, that's great. Like I want you to put in the work." If you're being lazy on it and like, I just like it because I'm Jon Acuff, then it's not going to go well. But yeah. I'll often have to sit on it. And then, I mean, if I'm being honest, there's definitely moments where depending on the person, I'm like, "I can't believe that. I'm so frustrated. I'm so mad." I'll go jog. Like yeah. There's moments when I get really, really mad over stuff I really, really care about. And the hope is that like the day later I'll go, "You know what? They want the same thing I want. Like they didn't send that to me as a personal attack. They didn't send that to me to say, 'Remember, you're dumb. Like remember like nobody likes your ideas. Your face is stupid.'"

Jon Acuff:

They send it because they want to sell the most books possible and help the most amount of people possible. And so like in Soundtracks, I said that. I said, "How often we don't choose the thoughts we want to have?" And so every listener right now has somebody that the second they text message them, they get furious. They don't even have to read the message. It's just true. The meeting they have, and so I will physically write down, "They're on your side. They want to make money too. They have like..." I'll write those down so that those thoughts, not my negative ones, you never have to go look for negative thoughts. They find you. You have to look for hope thoughts. You have to look for true thoughts. And so I'll do that.

Jon Acuff:

I've had multiple meetings with a handful of people that are frustrating to me, just because of our personalities or tension, whatever. And before the meeting, I'll write down on a post-it note because a lot of them are Zoom meetings, I can see it while we're talking. They want the same thing you want. This isn't an attack. They want to give you money. Write these things down and you go, "Well, that's silly. Yeah, I agree. I wish I didn't have to do that." But I do, because my brain is like, "Let's see this personally. Let's get furious about this and let's bite our nose off to spite our face or whatever it is. Like, let's do that right here and blow this whole thing up."

Jon Acuff:

And I'm like, "No, that sounds terrible. Why would we do that?" And they're like, my brain's like, "Because something bad happened 10 years ago that reminds you of this." And it's a completely different person, but let's do it again. I'm like, "No, no, no, no, no." So like there's all these little tricks I use.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So what's a Soundtrack? It's overthinking. It's a book all about what's a Soundtrack. The surprise is the subtitle, Surprising Solution to Overthinking and again, brilliant cover. Love it.

Jon Acuff:

Oh, thanks. Yeah, I was so happy with that. A soundtrack is a repetitive thought. A thought you get stuck on a loop. I define overthinking as when what you think gets in the way of what you want. And it always leads to inaction. And I say, overthinking is not a personality trait. It's the most expensive fear in the world because it steals time, creativity and productivity. And companies invest in this more than any other thing without even knowing they're doing it. So that's what overthinking is, is when you get on a loop. And a soundtrack is one of your repetitive overthinking thoughts where you have a personal soundtrack you hear in certain situations.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So what would a soundtrack for you be? Give us a couple of soundtracks that play in your head unless you check them.

Jon Acuff:

Yeah. They're trying to take advantage of you. So, if I've been hurt in business relationship where somebody did take advantage of me, that's fine to admit to process, to deal with, but it's not helpful if I then go, "Everyone is trying to take advantage of me. I have to protect what I'm doing." And then I bring that into a new negotiation where the person... like, I don't even have any information yet and I'm already from a place of, "They're trying to attack. Remember they're out to get you." So that would be a negative soundtrack. And so the book talks about you have to retire your broken soundtracks, replace them with new ones and then repeat them so often they become as automatic as the old ones.

Jon Acuff:

So that was where again, I'd write down, "They're trying to give you money." It's like whenever I go to a restaurant and they seem mad that I'm there, like whenever I have really bad service from a waiter, I just want to say, "I just want to tip you. The only reason I'm here is to buy your food and hopefully give you a great tip. This isn't a fight. You've put these things on the menu. I just want to choose them and then pay you money."

Jon Acuff:

But they're bringing some negative soundtrack into the situation and so that would be one for me. They're trying to take advantage of you. You're all out of ideas. Every time I sit down and write a book. "Oh, you're all out of ideas." All? My walls are covered with them. I have notebooks full of them, but this is the moment or everyone already knows that thing you're interested in. Everyone? I mean, you and I have talked about that. You had a conversation with a huge publisher that said, "Carey, this idea, I've never heard of this." And you had the same reaction-

Carey Nieuwhof:

I know, I know. I'm like, how could you never have heard of that? And you think you're late to the party, right?

Jon Acuff:

Yeah. I mean, but again, another soundtrack we already talked about would be, it's too late to have a podcast. It's too late to learn YouTube. It's too late to write a book. It's you're not qualified for that. Another one would be, I don't get to be an entrepreneur because my dad wasn't an entrepreneur. But that's a common one. People, especially men, they're like, "My dad never taught me how to change the oil." Or like you see these entrepreneurs that are like, "When I was a fetus, I had a side hustle and I've already sold 52 businesses." And you're like, "Well, I can't do that. So I must not be able to be an entrepreneur," and that's a broken soundtrack. So when you start to go through the book, you'll start to go, "Oh, I have those. I do that." What do I want to do instead? Because your thoughts, you know, impact your actions, which impacts your results.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. It's interesting because you hit a, what you self-describe as a career block in 2017 when Finish came out. You spend a chapter talking about that moment. I'd love to do that because I think a lot of people feel like, "Listen, Jon. I had a good thing going, okay. And then 2020 hit and it kind of blew up my business. I don't know if Church will ever be the same. I'm not great at this whole online thing. I don't know. I'm not 17. I didn't go to Stanford, like help me out here." So you ran into that just four years ago when Finish came out. What happened? How'd you talk yourself out of it?

Jon Acuff:

Well, I mean, there are certain things that if the longer I spend time away from them, the scarier they become and writing is one of them. I'd love to say that I'm one of these writers it's like I run through a field with a ribbon and it comes naturally. It doesn't. When I add a couple of fear days on top of each other, it gets easier and easier and easier to avoid it. And people feel that way about a lot of things. The gym. It's intimidating to go back to the gym or it's intimidating to try technology. Like maybe you've spent a year away from the current technology and every day you spend away feels more intimidating.

Jon Acuff:

I just felt like I got to a place where I wasn't actively writing. I didn't know what I wanted to write next. I was afraid to do the early stages of a book, which are always kind of awkward, which are always kind of figuring out what you want to do, which are always moving, shapes about and outlines about. And that just built on itself. And that's my job. I'm not a pastor where I write a book on the side. Like, this is the thing I do.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You're an author. This is what you do.

Jon Acuff:

And so like I had to jump back into it. So I did a couple of things. One thing I did was I did a comedy show. So I did a two night comedy gig where I wrote a 60 minutes set and that creatively helped kick my butt a little bit. And then I wrote a whole book about these funny ideas I had just to get back into the

muscle of writing. And so sometimes if you're stuck in an area doing something on the side of that area, can reintroduce you to the area. So I don't think anybody will ever read this 50,000 word-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. You never published that. I think I've read a chapter or two. It was actually good. It was fun, but why did you write it?

Jon Acuff:

I wrote it because I needed to get back into the habit of writing. It's the same way that like say you are a really consistent runner and then you took a year off. You shouldn't start with a marathon. You should give yourself the gift of walking around the neighborhood briskly. And so like that, I think self-kindness is a superpower. And so for me, the ridiculousness of sitting down to write... I wrote a whole essay about the optimism of subscribing to the New Yorker. I subscribed to the New Yorker and it was overwhelming. They send you a hundred thousand words every week. You would have to take a day off of work every week to catch up on the New Yorker. I had never purchased a single issue and I was like, "I need 52 of those delivered to my house," and a wave of content.

Jon Acuff:

So I wrote a silly essay about that, but again, it was easing back into it and I'm doing all my other jobs at the time. I don't have a life where I can go, "I'm just going to find myself." I was still speaking. I was still doing consulting. I was still doing all these things, but I would sneak away to the coffee house and try to write to get back into the rhythm of it so I could ease back into it versus like, "I've got to start everything tomorrow." That's not how my life works.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You and Seth Godin both give a lot of credit to Zig Ziglar. You got a chapter on him. Talk about Zig. And he just died like a few years ago. Didn't he? He was around until recently.

Jon Acuff:

I met he and his wife and his son, Tom, before he passed away. And he was just a fountain of information. He was giving me tips at lunch about travel and communication. And so for me, and that was what was interesting. I kept bumping into people I really liked. And I really respected who used Zigs affirmations. The idea of reprogramming the way you think. Because it's a muscle, like thinking's a muscle. And so hearing Seth talk about that. Another friend of mine named Tim Grahl talked about that. And so I really was like, "Okay, I want to explore what Zig does. And then I got to interview his son, Tom. That's probably one of my favorite parts of the book because I kept trying to break down Tom from the positivity standpoint. Tom is a big believer in intentional positivity.

Jon Acuff:

Seth is a big believer in that. Zig was a big believer in that. So I kept looking for loopholes, because I tend to be sarcastic and negative and I was like, "But what about, but what about?" And Tom was like, "Yeah, no, here's what you think about. Here's what you like." For instance, Tom Ziglar said that his dad wasn't against admitting there's a problem. He wasn't like a Pollyanna. He was like, "No, admit there's a problem so you can fix it. If you pretend there's not, you don't get to fix it. But focus on the solution, not

the problem." And so like a lot of people, when they admit there's a problem, they stay on the problem, they don't work on the solution. So I was like, "Okay, well give me another example."

Jon Acuff:

And one of them is examples was when my dad would get delayed at an airport. If you fly more than twice a year, you're getting delayed. That's happening. That's just math. It never hurt him because he always carried his most important work with him. So a delayed flight was an invitation to do the thing that mattered most to him. And that's a subtle shift, but that's him going, "I'm not going to let a delayed flight ruin my day."

Jon Acuff:

We have this culture where we're like, "I woke up on the wrong side of the bed. Like our traffic was terrible. My whole day is ruined." Or "I saw a tweet I disagreed with. My whole day is ruined." Forget that. Stop giving all those negative thoughts the power to control your day Zig. Would say, "No. I know I'm going to have a delayed flight because that's what happens. Sometimes it happens so that I'm safe and they want to de-ice the plane, whatever. But I'm going to have my most important work with me. And when it gets delayed, boom, I'm going to go work on that. And I'm going to knock that out. I'm going to feel great about it."

Jon Acuff:

So I just really appreciated Zigs deliberate approach. It wasn't fake. It wasn't syrupy. It was action-based. I am lumped into the motivational space and I really get frustrated by motivational people that don't give you real advice with real steps and real actions. It's one of my pet peeves. And so I love to simplify things. I love it to be actionable. That's why I like Soundtracks because I felt like I got to take this complicated topic of thinking and really boil it down and test it and try it and then give practical actions.

Carey Nieuwhof:

One of the things for those of us who travel a lot or used to travel a lot, it is easy to come-

Jon Acuff:

I used to travel. Yeah. Suitcases and stuff is crazy.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh dude, I'll tell you. And I was flying about 150,000 miles the last couple of years before COVID and one of the things, because we have spent a lot of time together on the road is, we'd be at an event and I'd be like, "Ugh, my flight's delayed," or whatever. And you, was it intentional that you don't complain about travel? "It's like, dude, no, we get to do this." And I'm sure you've cracked once in a while and complained about it. But like you've had a very positive attitude in my experience to travel to like, "No, I get to do this." Was that a Soundtrack thing that you developed early on?

Jon Acuff:

One of mine was I deliberately... if I make my flight, I got to go home and that's a huge win and I'm deliberate about that. If I jumped on an early flight, that's a huge win and I got to go home. So I try to look at it that way and go, "Okay, I got to do this." And then a lot of it, and I put this in the book, a lot of it was perceived anger or shame or frustration from my family that they weren't giving me. I was adding

that. We as people with our soundtracks, we'll add things to situations that aren't really there. So I was adding the soundtrack. My wife is furious that I travel. She's so mad. And eventually one day she said, "I'm not. Go do your job. I love that you're good at that. I love that you're great at that. Go do your job."

Jon Acuff:

And then the second part with the kids was she was like, with mirror neurons, your kids will reflect back what you put out. So I was making a huge deal about travel. One of the biggest things I do is like, "I'm so sorry. I have to go travel. I'll be home in two sleeps. I'll call you every minute." And your kids don't even know to be sad. They don't know like, "Oh, this is a terrible thing." "They just go like, 'Oh, you're going to work.'" But like Jenny said, "You're giving them your shame and your guilt and your sadness and they'll reflect that. Don't do that. Just go do your job. And let's see it as a positive thing." And what's interesting, we spend 18 years telling our kids that work sucks and then we're surprised that in their twenties, they don't want to do a job.

PART 3 OF 4 ENDS [01:09:04]

Jon Acuff:

Well, of course they don't. So I had to deliberately change travel into, I can't believe I get to do this, because it's awesome. And I found a job I love so much that every delayed flight doesn't even hit me, because the hour onstage, worth every delayed flight. It's amazing. And so now it becomes a filter for am I doing the right thing? If I'm willing to put up with 10 things that a lot of people feel frustrated about, and I'm still excited, I bumped into something that's soul connected. Like, okay, cool. If I'm willing to stay at the La Quinta in the Baltimore airport because a flight got canceled, and I'm still like, you know what, pretty good day, then all right, I'm onto something.

Carey Nieuwhof:

How do you write a new anthem? I think you call it a new anthem in the book. So you've got this bad soundtrack. It's this stuck record, this broken record playing in your head. How do you create a new anthem? What do you do?

Jon Acuff:

The easiest way, the simplest way to do it, is to flip the old one. So if you say, you know, people are trying to take advantage of me, people are trying to help me. People are trying to help me. And I'm going to find ways to see that. I'm going to look for that. So don't go to a blank piece of paper and go, "Okay, I have to come up with some amazing thoughts that I think." Oh, that's super intimidating. I think you can get there, but entry-level is you take something that's broken and you flip it, and you go, what's the opposite of this? If travel is negative, travel is positive, and I'm going to find proof of that. I'm going to look for proof of that. I'm going to look for good things.

Jon Acuff:

Again, you have to actively collect those things and you have to be deliberate about that, because that was one of the things in the book. In the English language, we don't have a word for the opposite of trauma. That's how powerful trauma is. We physically don't have a word that's the opposite.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh wow. Yeah, that's true.

Jon Acuff:

What I mean by that, and scientists have studied it, there's not a word to describe, like when you're in a grocery store and trauma comes up from four years ago, there's not a positive version of that that happens. Your brain just doesn't work that way, where you're in the grocery store and you get this overwhelming like, oh man, four years ago, this thing happened, and it carries your day. Trauma, on the other hand, does that all the time. And so you have to go, okay, knowing that, I'm going to actively find that.

Jon Acuff:

So the easiest way is I think about it like a coin. You flip a coin. One side says, people are trying to take advantage of me. I'm too old to do this. It's too late. And I'd write down, there's still time. There's still time. And you might not believe it at first, but you're going to repeat it enough until you do. I mean, right now I've got on this one note, it says light and easy, because I wanted this new book to be light and easy. The writing process, I just wrote it again because the note fell down. I want the marketing to be light and easy. It's going to be light and easy. So I'm working on that, and I'm working to be deliberate about that. And I'm going to hustle really hard.

Jon Acuff:

Here's another one. The note says specific is sexy, because I know that if I'm specific in my writing, it's so much better writing. When I say something, it's not good. When I say, "In Albuquerque at two in the morning, this happened," or when I say, "I don't wear enough hoodies," I didn't say because I'm not cool enough. I didn't say I wasn't a tech pioneer because I'm not cool enough. That's not sexy. That's not specific. Specific is hoodie, because it triggers, oh yeah, Mark Zuckerberg is always wearing hoodies. That's a specific-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, I was back at Stanford, literally driving down the road at Stanford, watching all these engineering students in hoodies, going you took me there with that image. That's why I dropped the book. I'm like, that's genius.

Jon Acuff:

That, for me, is how you do it. So you write it, you flip them, you collect them, you write it down, you borrow them. You're going to hear great ones from other people that say, you know, like Colleen Barry, the woman I interviewed for my podcast, she was like, "Everybody has a different alignment in their car, and sometimes you have to steer harder to the right for your car."

Jon Acuff:

And I was like, "Oh, you're right." There's days where, like, this day just sucks and I've got to steer harder to the right. Some days I only have to do two of the stress relief things. Some days I've got to do the whole 10, because it's been a garbage day. That's okay. I'm going to steer right. So I might put steer right on a post-it note, because I want to see it again. I want to be reminded of it again. When everything kind of gets lost, I want to be very deliberate about that and go, okay, that's right, that's right. I remember that. That calls back to this. Like, all right, we're cool.

Carey Nieuwhof:

The reframing is really powerful. It's funny, because I've heard you say that, "People want to give me money," which sounds on the one hand, you kind of look at that and go, what? What are you talking about? But I actually used that today in a staff meeting. We're getting ready to launch a course to thousands of leaders. And my staff is like, "Okay, we want to make sure we over deliver. We want to make sure." And everybody has this silent guilt about that. And actually, you say that, Brad Lomenick says that. And I'm like, "No, no, no, no. Not everybody's going to buy the course. That's fine." But there's some people going, "I need some help and I'm willing to invest in it."

Jon Acuff:

Totally, dude. Here's another one you can use with your team. So don't say the number, obviously. Take the number of how many people bought your last course. That's the number of people you're creating for. The problem is when teams start stuff, they go, "We've got to do something that reaches a million people." They never say that out loud, but that's the expectation. Screw that. You've got to find 10,000 people. Of all the humans, that's fantastic. Of seven billion, you only have to find 10,000 of them and you have to create and serve them? Awesome. That takes the pressure in a completely different way.

Jon Acuff:

Same with writing a book. If you sit down to write a book and you go, "Okay, I've got to sell two million copies of this," forget it, dude. If you sit down and go, "I've got to find 10,000 people that are going to be engaged," it changes it. And those 10,000 people are going to be really excited. And so it's little things like that, that again, I don't mean, you know, people are trying to give me money I know can sound like some sort of weird message. But for me, it reframes my thinking, that the reason we're in this conversation is that they're interested.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Listen, I tried to raise money for 20 years in the church, for a cause I believed in, and I just assumed nobody wanted to give. And then that reframing, yeah, there's going to be people who don't give, but there are people who want to live a generous lifestyle, who believe in the mission, who actually want to make a contribution. So please invite me to give. And don't coerce the people who don't. As Seth Godin says, we quote him a lot. They don't get the joke. This isn't for them. But there are people for whom this is.

Jon Acuff:

Think about this. Do you understand how different your actions would be if you approached it from people are trying to give me money, versus I have to go take people's money? Do you know the shame and the guilt? And like, I've got to go get their money. Man, you do different things. Where if you say, people are trying to give me money, you go, I've got to make it as easy as possible for them. I've got to make it as clear as possible for them. I've got to make sure that I super serve their real needs. Not mine.

Jon Acuff:

Like, I'm Carey Nieuwhof in a basement with a successful podcast. I've got to be in the trenches so that I know, oh, we were going to do this module, and this, but man, we really heard this need for this. We need to make sure we serve that need. Because it's been 10 years since I've had that need personally,

but that person is still in that space. I really need to help him with that. What do I do to do that? It changes how you approach what you're creating, which is I've got to go take it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And then the people who don't buy in, that's great. We've got lots of other stuff for you. You don't ever have to give me a dollar. That's fine. It's a hundred percent. I don't have to be mad at you. You don't have to be mad at me. That's okay.

Jon Acuff:

That's not a hater. That's not a hater. That's somebody that chose something different, and that's great. That's where it has to be a product, not your personality.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And dude, this conversation was free.

Jon Acuff:

Yeah, exactly. Exactly.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So we've got lots there. Oh, this is good. What's one thing about overthinking that many people miss, other than the government does not make you eat your steak well done in Canada? That's the only inaccuracy in the book, Jon, I don't mean to call you out.

Jon Acuff:

I was told in Canada by the waitress that we couldn't eat our steak. We had to order it well done. So you take that up with whoever's in Whistler.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You were in Vancouver, right? Were you at Whistler?

Jon Acuff:

We were at Whistler, yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, listen, you come to my backyard, I'll cook it medium rare, however you want.

Jon Acuff:

I would love that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I've never heard that. I've never heard that, but that's okay. We're still friends.

Jon Acuff:

I tweeted it and people from Canada were really mad and were like, well, that's just because we have better food standards than your terrible country.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I've lived here my whole life. I've never heard that.

Jon Acuff:

Isn't that weird? Yeah. So a lot of people overlook about overthinking, that they can do something about it. It's not something that is, it's not set in stone, and you can actually use it for you. You can turn, I can't write a book, into I should write a book. I should definitely write a book. I'm the best person to write this book. And that feels impossible maybe at first, but it's a hundred percent doable.

Jon Acuff:

So the story I tell of my own life in there is 2008, I get an email from a conference planner that's like, will you come speak at our conference? And I was like, yeah, I think I could do that. I had no proof of that. I'd never been paid to speak. I'd never done a speech before. I had no tangible evidence. All I had was a single thought that was like, I think I can do this. And that, I kept building on. I kept repeating. I kept growing. And so yeah, that's the biggest thing. That's what gets me excited is when you change the way you think about yourself, about your relationships, about your world, you do get to change your actions, and it does get to change your results. And that's what I would say.

Jon Acuff:

I think most people think a thought is something they have, not something they hone. They wait for a thought to show up, versus going, no, these are the thoughts I'm going to have. Here's how I'm going to hone them and change them and be excited about them. And I'm going to pull this slingshot back and kind of launch with this, versus, well, I woke up on the wrong side of the bed, or whoa, I have these five thoughts and I'm a prisoner to the five thoughts, versus going like, nah, these are the 10 that are going to, this is my soundtrack. This is my playlist. And it's a playlist I want to hear. And when I hear a song that I don't want to hear, I'm going to recognize it, I'm going to retire it, and I'm going to replace it with something new.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And I think this is a really good thing to be focusing on this year. It has been a whole heap of negative. We were already heading there before the disruption, the crisis. And I think a lot of us are stuck in our heads. And what's interesting, Groeschel, speaking of him, and we're all working out now, he was on this show at the beginning of the year, in February, I think, talking about what he would call overthinking, *Winning the War in your Mind*. Read his book, completely different take than your book. Both really helpful, both extremely good. So *Soundtracks* is available anywhere books are sold. You read the audiobook, as well, which is always my favorite. Truth.

Jon Acuff:

Yeah, I added a bunch of bonus stories. So there's a bonus chapter. There's six different bonus stories that I went through and actually wrote out, versus just riffs, like really fun bonus content. Yeah, I love reading audiobooks. For the books I write, it'd be weird if I got some British dude that was reading the books, because a lot of them are in the trench, like mistakes I'm making. It'd be weird.

Carey Nieuwhof:

My favorite is authors who read their own books, by far. And your stuff, I mean, laugh out loud. It's a lot of fun. Tell us about where people can find you these days, all the channels.

Jon Acuff:

There's a lot of them. I mean, my podcast, the name of it is All It Takes is Goal. If you look up Jon Acuff for All It Takes is a Goal, it's everywhere podcasts are available. The Instagram is just Jon Acuff, J-O-N A-C-U-F-F. Same with Twitter. YouTube, I'm Author Jon Acuff, and Facebook, Author Jon Acuff. And then my website's acuff.me. So a lot of different places. And Soundtracks, I'm super excited about. It's going to be super fun. So would love people to, you know, if you thought to yourself, "I overthink," or the thing that I keep bumping into is people that'll go, "Oh, my husband needs this book," or "My friend needs this book," or "My team needs this book. We're going to lead our company through it." I've never had a topic that so many people have said, "Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, I identify with the idea of overthinking." So I'm excited about it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I can't wait to see this get into people's hands. And for those of you who do what Jon and I do, one of the reasons, and I'm going to embarrass you for a second. One of the reasons I love our friendship, but one of the reasons I love reading what you write and watching your videos and following your craft, is you work so hard at it. And I have so much respect for that. And if you just want to become a better communicator, if you want to become a better author, honestly, just buy the book. It's so well done. So well done.

Jon Acuff:

I really appreciate that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Thanks for gifting the world. Thanks for gifting us. This has been a lot of fun. It always is.

Jon Acuff:

And I'll have you on mine at some point, when I'm ready.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, that'd be a lot of fun. I wasn't going to ask, because when people do that, it gets awkward, right?

Jon Acuff:

No, but it would definitely fun to be on the other side of it. And it was fun to be on the other side with you and Toni. I was honored that we got to do that conversation.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow. We really wanted you to lead us in that, and we're so grateful for you. Thanks, Jon.

Jon Acuff:

Thanks, Carey.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, it's always so good hanging out with Jon. Hope you enjoyed that as much as I did. And we've got show notes for you. You can go to CareyNieuwhof.com/episode408 to get those, including transcripts. In just a second, I've got a What I'm Thinking About the segment, and Jon wrote a book on overthinking. So I thought I'd give you my take. How do you know when you can trust your gut and when you can't? Just a few thoughts on that coming up.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But first, today's episode is brought to you by BELAY Solutions. Make sure you get their free guide, their productivity guide on how to measure productivity, Five Essential Strategies to Unleash your Productivity. Go to belaysolutions.com/cnlp, and go to servehq.church to sign up for your free 14 day trial. Use the code Carey for serve HQ, and you can get 10% off for life. That's C-A-R-E-Y at servehq.church.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Next episode, Rick Warren is coming up, and we have a long conversation about all kinds of things, including politics, including whether churches are being persecuted in this pandemic because they can't open, including, well, some really personal stuff, as well. Here's an excerpt.

Rick Warren:

It's our job as church leaders to work on dis-ease, the stress that's being caused by all these changes in society, rapid changes, and all these storms, where to work on the dis-ease. And I'm telling you, guys, you can write this down and take it to the bank. This next year, and even after that, there's going to be a tsunami of grief.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Very grateful to be able to bring you Rick Warren next time around. Also coming up, subscribers, you know this. We've got Alan George from Life Church. Tim Keller is coming back to the podcast, Francis Chan, Annie F. Downs, Simon Sinek. Who else have we got? Mark Clark's going to make a return appearance. We also have Gordon MacDonald, very excited for that, Alison Fallon, and many others. So if you subscribe, you get it for free wherever you get your podcasts. And I just love being able to do this with you, week after week after week.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, now it's time for What I'm Thinking About. So if you heard, I think we kicked off 2021 with this episode, but Andy Stanley talking about how he trusts Enneagram eights, because they have good gut instinct. Yeah, so I'm an eight with a wing seven, and I've got a pretty strong gut instinct. Now, it's not always right. But probably my natural inclination is to actually not overthink things, but to just go with my gut. Now, what I realized as a young leader, as I think Andy and I talked about, is sometimes that gets you into trouble. It's like your gut isn't always right. So I've had to learn to think about things a little bit longer without getting to the other side of the equation, which is now I'm overthinking.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So here's a question. How do you know whether you can trust your gut or not? So ask yourself this question. Has your intuition, has your gut been reliable in the past? Because sometimes it's your gut that

gets you into trouble. It's like, this person's the right hire, and nope, they're not. Or I should really not do that, and then you realize, oh, I wish I'd done that. We'd be so much further ahead. Okay, so take a look at your track record and go, am I pretty good at judging this? Or am I kind of missing stuff a lot of the time? Because that'll tell you whether your gut has a good track record.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Then the second question you can ask is, is my gut reaction consistent or inconsistent with Scripture? I just need to ask that, because my impulses aren't always good, right? It's like, well, actually, no, there's something pretty clear about that. So you want to definitely, if you're a person of faith like I am, pay attention to that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And then number three, and this is for those of us who tend to underthink, not overthink, what are the implications of my actions? Play it out in your mind. Where do the dominoes fall? You know, three months from now, what's going to happen? Six months from now, what's going to happen? Oh, if I do this, then this also happens. So I don't want to get into the analysis of paralysis. I don't want to get into overthinking, but then if I don't think, then I'm like, oh, okay, I can see where this is going. And you've got to at least pause and think about that before you just jump on a whim.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And then I love this question. We'll end it here. Okay. No, no. I've got one more thing after this, too. Ask yourself, five years from now what will I wish I had done? That question has saved me so much heartache. Five years from now, what will I wish I had done? And sometimes that leads in different things. Sometimes it's going to be like, okay, I wish I'd done it. Sometimes it's like, I wish I hadn't. And you'll know instantly.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I mean, my wife and I, we've been in the same house for years and years and years. We wondered about moving. But the real estate market is insane right now where I live, and you know what, we thought about it. We looked at some properties, and then we said, nope, we're just going to stay here. And I'm really content with that, because five years from now, there's no downside. I didn't have to leave a community. And we have tons of equity in this house, and it's a modest house, but hey, that's great. We're just going to stay here. Not going to get involved in the crazy. We're not leveraged five years from now. That's a good decision. And if the market stabilizes or turns around and we want to move in the future, well, we can move in the future. And if not, we lost nothing by staying here.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So five years from now, what will I wish I had done? Very, very clarifying. Sometimes on a personal level, that can be like, I'm going to wish I had apologized. I'm going to wish I had owned it. I'm going to wish I had left. I'm going to wish I had stayed. But you kind of know that when you ask yourself the question.

Carey Nieuwhof:

The final thing is, what are other people telling you? Always, always, and the older I get, the more I pay attention to this, is just get some wise people around you and ask them, hey, what do you think? And that's what we did when we were thinking about moving, because there's a couple of things, we wish

we had a little more room. We wish we had a little more of this, a little more of that. I just called up somebody that I have trusted for years and years and years to help me make decisions, called up a few of them and they're like, well, you want to think about this, and you want to think about that. And I'm like, oh yeah, we'll just stay put for now.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So wisdom is often disguised as other people. And if they are godly people who make great decisions with their lives, who have your best interest in mind, pay attention to what they're saying. I mean, once in a while, you're going to be the I'm the lone ranger, here I am, making my decision all by myself. And for the most part though, that's how you end up in the ditch. So hope that is helpful. What are other people saying, wise people? Ask yourself, five years from now, what will you wish you had done? What are the implications of your actions? Is your gut reaction consistent or inconsistent with scripture, and has your intuition been reliable in the past?

Carey Nieuwhof:

So that leads those of us who perhaps don't overthink enough to think a little bit more. And if you're an overthinker, well, maybe trust your gut a little bit more. Hope that helps. Do pick up a copy of Jon's book. It's fantastic. I've read it. It's, well, it's classic Acuff. Okay, see you next time for a fresh episode. And I hope our time together today has helped you lead like never before.

Announcer:

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

PART 4 OF 4 ENDS [01:29:27]