

Announcer:

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

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, hey everybody. And welcome to episode 419 of the podcast. It's Carey here, and I hope our time together today helps you lead like never before. I am very excited to have Brett Hagler as my guest today. Brett leads New Story, the first non-profit to launch out of Y Combinator. And if those words mean anything to you, you know exactly how significant that is. And if not, well you're going to really enjoy this. But if you like innovation, Y Combinator by the way, incubated companies like Airbnb, Dropbox, Coinbase, Reddit, and DoorDash, just to name a few. And yeah, Brett tells us all about it, what it was like, what innovation is about. And I'm so excited for it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

This episode is brought to you by our partners at World Vision. Your soul care is so important. They have a free web series with Danielle Strickland, they'd love for you to check out. Go to worldvision.org/carey. And by Generis, you can schedule your free generosity pulse report today, an exclusive offer for listeners of this podcast, by going to generis.com/carey.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, Brett is the CEO and co-founder of New Story. He is also the co-founder of Home Team Ventures, an early stage venture capital firm. Brett is a Y Combinator alum, as I've indicated. He's been recognized on Forbes 30 under 30 list. And his company was named among Fast Company's Most Innovative Companies in the World in 2017, 2019, and 2020. In five years, New Story has raised more than \$60 million and built over 3,000 homes in 25 communities. And in 2019, they started printing 3D homes in Mexico with their partner, Icon, as the world's first 3D printed community. I was so intrigued when I heard about this. Brett reached out to me. He's been a long time listener of the podcast and we have a bunch of mutual friends. And so, we met at South by Southwest a couple of years ago. And I was speaking there. He was there, and I toured a 3D printed home. Crazy. Like, unbelievable. You would live there. Like, it's amazing to see what they're doing now for a world that really needs housing. And it's a super cool conversation.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, I think you're going to love this. And a shout out to all the young entrepreneurs. I'm meeting more and more of you young entrepreneurs in your 20s, 30s. A lot of you Silicon Valley-based, startup-based who are listening to this podcast. Welcome, we're so glad to have you. And of course, the usual mix of church leaders and various leaders and corporate leaders. Just so glad to have you along on this podcast. You know, this has been an incredibly difficult season, no matter what you're doing. And if you want to take care of your soul, our partner World Vision, they are called to serve the most vulnerable around the world. But they also feel called to serve you as leaders. And that includes caring for you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, they partnered with my friend, Danielle Strickland, to provide a practical resource called Soul Care Prayer Postures. It's a free web series. And Danielle has talked about some of this stuff. Now she's got it

together. She's talked about it on this show. Now she's got it together for World Vision. It's free. And this can care for your soul, give you very practical tools to make sure you start off your day or end your day well. And you can sign up for free by going to worldvision.org/carey. That's worldvision.org/carey.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Now, a lot of churches have experienced stability in giving over the last year. By the way, we're going to get into giving a little bit in this episode. And that's some of the best news that the team at Generis has heard during the pandemic. But the question is, when will the shoe drop? I mean, what's happening with inflation? 2021 going to be as stable? Will giving begin to trend down? What's happening? I mean, we're missing a lot of people from the church, even on the return to church.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, the truth is, whether it's next month, next year, or five years, something will shift. It's just part of the natural ebb and flow. Why not get prepared ahead of time? The team at Generis is offering a free opportunity for church leaders of this podcast to do exactly that with their Generosity Pulse Report. Think of the Generosity Pulse Report as a quick snapshot of your health for the culture of stewardship and giving that you have at your church. Wouldn't it be helpful to know where you stand? Where your vulnerabilities are, what you need perhaps improvement on? And you can schedule your free Generosity Pulse Report today, an exclusive offer for listeners of this podcast. All you need to do is go to generis.com/carey.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And with all that spelling done, let's jump into my conversation with Brett Hagler, the founder and CEO of New Story. Brett, welcome to the podcast. It's great to finally connect in this space, rather than ... Well, I've always enjoyed connecting with you. But good to have you on the show.

Brett Hagler:

Thanks for having me, Carey. Been a big fan and have learned a lot from your guests, so it's an honor to be on with you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I've learned a lot from you. So, we're going to start. People say, "What are you doing with your life?" It's like, "You know, I don't know. I do a podcast, I write a book or so." You're 3D printing houses, which is insane. How did you ever come up with the idea of 3D printing a house?

Brett Hagler:

Well, our mission at New Story is, we say to pioneer solutions to end global homelessness. So, we kind of start there. And for us, when we're trying to work on a problem that is the size of about 1.6 billion people that don't have adequate housing, it's hard to wrap your head around the size of that problem. We just believe that you have to take big swings and you have to try things that, if they work, have a chance to be a breakthrough. And knowing that there's a risk and most of them will not work. But what if it actually does?

Brett Hagler:

And so, we kind of start with that framework of, how do we work on things and invest time and invest budget into calculated risk that if it works, it's not going to be an incremental change or a little bit better or a linear improvement. Ideally, it's an out-sized return and change and can completely change the cost of housing or the speed of housing or the quality of housing. And we're very interested in taking bets on those projects because if one of them works, then we're able to impact exponentially more people than if we just kind of stuck to the safer status quo way of working.

Brett Hagler:

So, that's a little bit of framing of how we think about the problem that we're solving, and that's kind of our mindset. And so, we do a lot of other things aside from 3D printing houses. I think if you ... Amazon's a good example of, people ask, "What is Amazon?" Right? And they have all these different product lines and businesses. And it really comes down to their core principles, which is ... I don't want to butcher it, but it's really around customer obsession, inventing, and longterm thinking, right? And they're applying those principles to, whether it's their eCommerce site or their delivery or AWS now, you name it. And we like to think of ourselves as having core principles around innovation and longterm thinking. And then we're able to apply those to, in this case, 3D printing houses for the poor.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, that's crazy. Okay. So, we're going to drill down on that more. But give us the ... For leaders who may be new to what you're doing at New Story, can you give us the elevator pitch, the 60 second pitch? Like, here's what we do, here's why we exist.

Brett Hagler:

Yeah, yeah. So, New Story is a non-profit that pioneers solutions to end global homelessness. Started about six years ago in 2015. It was my 25th birthday, started after a trip that I took to Haiti with my best friend, Mike Arrieta, who's been on your podcast before. Saw the problem, wanted to do something about it. And really wanted to try to do things differently. And so, we had a blank slate of being young and entrepreneurial and ambitious and really wanted to start something that would be different than a traditional non-profit. And that's actually why it's called New Story is because we wanted to create a new story in, not only the family we're able to partner with and help, but really a new story in how we think about a more modern, refreshed, kind of next generation of charity. And so, that's how it got started. And we work with families that are in extreme poverty that do not have adequate housing. And we're able to partner with them to build homes and communities, and now almost small cities throughout Haiti, El Salvador, and Mexico.

Brett Hagler:

And all of our homes are about \$6,000 to \$10,000. And since starting in 2015, we went from ... I know we're going to get into a little bit of the entrepreneurial journey. But we went from nothing, zero dollars, no connections, to now if things go the way we hope this year, over \$80 million raised since then, and hopefully close to 4,000 different homes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, that's incredible. So, we connected before South by Southwest 2019. But you and I met there. And you said, "Hey, Carey. You've got to go see this. I'll show you a 3D printed home." So, my brain, not very big, all right? I'm like, "I don't know. What is that?" Like, I had this picture of a printer, I had cardboard in mind. But seriously, it's a house I would live in. It is beautiful. It's modest. But it's actually, you have

design principles in there. So, the 3D printer, and we toured your factory at the time too, and then saw the model house at South by in 2019. I mean, it's basically poured concrete walls done by this massive 3D printer. So, can you paint a picture for people like me, who just couldn't even imagine what a 3D print ... Like, you know, you see on YouTube, people are 3D printing guns or whatever.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I'm like, "I don't even know how that works." But then you see a house and it's like inhabitable and it keeps you out of the rain and it's nice. And it's actually quite attractive. Can you just walk us through that process? Because that was brain bending for me.

Brett Hagler:

Yeah, so you were there in 2018 at South by Southwest. And this was the first house in the US that was 3D printed. This was in partnership with our partner, Icon. And that was the facility that you toured. And that was the first attempt. And honestly, it worked better than a lot of us thought it would. And we were just ... You know, it passed the housing code. It was the first permanent 3D printed home in the United States. And that was really a kind of launching pad for kind of the next phase in our evolution, which we just finished New Story 3D printing a neighborhood in rural Mexico.

Brett Hagler:

We actually did this before the pandemic happened. And then we had to take a big pause. And we just finished more recently. And there's an Apple TV documentary about that, if people are curious.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, cool.

Brett Hagler:

And how it works, or how I would describe it to somebody that's not as familiar, it is a proprietary cement mix that's coming out of a machine. It's like a gantry style machine. And the mix is coming out almost like soft serve ice cream is kind of what the consistency looks like. And it starts at the very bottom. And it does one layer that is about an inch and a half thick, depending on how we're doing it. And then, it will just do entire layers to the very top of the home. And so, whatever the CAD file is of the house or the house design, the machine is just doing what it's told. And it's layering the exact specifics of the interior and exterior walls from the very bottom up to the top. And that's how it works.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, it's really cool. So, the printer, actually to me looked like a giant construction crane, almost. Like, a big beam across it. And then, the printer kind of moved around on a track and did what it was told. But I mean, you've got windows in the house. Like, if you see the finished product, you would be like, "How did you build this?" It's like, I don't know, looks like a concrete house that people put together. But you get the economies of scale. I mean, your first one cost you a ridiculous amount of money. But the idea is, you can pop them out now once you've got the technology, for a few thousand dollars, as opposed to tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars. But it really looks ... And what's the square footage on the units that you're producing now?

Brett Hagler:

They can range anywhere from, on the very low end around 500 square feet. And now our partner, Icon, is doing ... They're doing homes that are, I believe, over 1,000 square feet, with larger ones to come. So, New Story, we specifically focus internationally. And we work with families that are in extreme poverty that are living on really a couple of dollars a day. So, the homes that we do are much smaller. They're between 500 to 650 square feet. Couple rooms in the home, a bedroom, a shower, clean running water, electricity. And it's a longterm, built to last asset. So, it's a great product for the price point. And it's something that we're very excited about scaling out.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. And if people are saying, "Wow, that sounds really small." If you haven't done a missions trip, like you did in Haiti, or I've been to Guatemala, Nicaragua many times to work with the Mayan people there. I mean, no, 500 square feet is huge when you see what they are living in and how they accommodate, it's a pretty cool solution.

Brett Hagler:

Yeah. And especially if you go from ... You know, the families we work with, they literally do not have life's most basic human needs, right?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Like running water. Like a stove.

Brett Hagler:

They don't have clean water. They do not have safety and shelter, right? And most don't have a good supply of food. Yeah, so it's a black and white life-changing difference that, not only the home, but the water and the electricity and the cleanliness can provide. And that just unlocks so much potential for folks to earn income, improve the education, improve their health. It's a very long list. So, that's what we get excited about. And we love bringing innovation to the people that need it most, because what usually happens is, people that need innovation most will be the ones to get it last. And we structured our organization where we want to be out on the forefront and we want to take calculated risk, right?

Brett Hagler:

And the last thing I'll say about the 3D printing project, in the early days when we were trying to figure out, do we take this risk, right? Do we put in time? Do we put in R&D money? When most likely it's not going to work, right? It's definitely not going to work. But what if it actually did work? And we kind of extrapolated that out. And we got to the point for our mission to say, we actually think it's irresponsible for us not to try it. And playing it safe and hitting the easy button and not taking the risk, that's irresponsible because if this does work, there's a chance that we can impact that many more families. And so, that's how we made our decision. And yeah, we say irresponsible not to try, as a mantra.

Brett Hagler:

And we have another mantra that it's crazy until it's not, right? When you have these ideas in the beginning, a lot of people are going to tell you that you're crazy. And it's actually a good sign because that means you're onto something, right? And then, if it works, well, then everybody's going to congratulate you. Then there's going to be an Apple TV documentary, there's going to be all this press. There's going to be all this excitement. And that's why we say it's crazy until it's not. So, what I would

challenge the listeners with is ... And it doesn't have to be on as big of a scale as that, or something that's shiny or sexy or exciting. But what are you doing that would be crazy until it's not? And hopefully you have a few things on your list or you can put those on your list as priorities that would be just that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's such a good challenge, because I wanted to ask you about the big swings, right? You could have done a lot of things with your life. You could have done a lot of things with New Story. And you're right. I always think incremental change gets you incremental results, right? So, we're going to tweak this, or we'll do a slightly better version than, pick your favorite charity is doing. And you're like, "No, we're going to 3D print houses. We're going to go into places others aren't, try things that could spectacularly fail."

Carey Nieuwhof:

What have you learned about that big swing? Because there's a lot of leaders right now who are like, "What could go horribly wrong?" And it's like, "Well, nothing, because we played it so safe. Like, we're slightly innovating. Yes, we took our church online. Yes, we took our business online. But that's the biggest innovation." And that's not really innovation. That's adaptation, right? So, I would say probably there's a lot of leaders listening right now who are like, "Yeah, we're not innovating." Talk us through the psychology of starting New Story and figuring out, "Okay, we're going to swing big. We're going to go for the fences. And if we die, we die trying."

Brett Hagler:

Well, the first thing I'll say is, I still think that we're very wise and calculated in our decisions, right? So, I'm never going to do anything that ... This is not my style, right? Maybe it's Elon Musk style or somebody else's. But I'm never going to bet the whole company on something, right? At least, I don't think so. Maybe at one point there's that conviction. But you know, you need to be calculated in your risk profile. But there ideally needs to be a real risk profile, right? Because without the risk, you're not going to get the out-sized returns. And as a leader, you can do that. You can set your budget, right? You can think, "What's the line in my budget for R&D and innovation this year?" Right? And if it's probably very small, you could increase that very easily, you know? Closer to 10% or above, because if it doesn't work, it's not going to sink the organization. It's not going to sink church, right? It's not ... You're not betting it all on that, right? So, I'll just preface with that.

Brett Hagler:

And then, as far as the mindset, I think this has probably been our differentiator or my differentiator, where there's a lot of things that I do not have whatsoever, a lot of weaknesses, a lot of things that other founders and CEOs or leaders are so much better at. But the thing that I think we've done and I've done is we have not been afraid to be bold, to dream big, and aim high. And what I've learned is that bold ideas attract bold people, right? You set a bold goal. And when you have bold ambition, that has to be genuine, it has to be real. You need to be called to it, right? It attracts the right people that want to be part of that, right? It attracts the kind of talent that want to come work there. It attracts the kind of investors or donors or supporters or brand partners that want to get behind you. And you have to have that bold vision to attract the bold people and the bold resources.

Brett Hagler:

And so, I think we've done that. And it's not like you have to have all these qualifications to do it. It's somewhat of a choice, right? I mean, I think you do have to start small. I don't think you can one night just announce, "We're going something insane or crazy." You have to build your way up. But that's how, to answer your question, that was in our DNA from the beginning was being bold, taking big swings, being vulnerable, putting ourselves out there. And we eventually caught momentum. And momentum begets momentum. And that's how we started attracting really great talent, really great philanthropic funders because that was who we were. That was our DNA. And that's how we got into Y Combinator as well.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, that's exactly where I was going to go next. We're going to talk about attracting bold donors because that's something a lot of leaders are trying to do. It's like, "I need a partner, I need to raise money for what we're doing," that kind of thing. But let's do ... I was so excited when I was doing research for this because I didn't know that you were part of Y Combinator, but that is like this mythic startup thing for young leaders in the Bay Area, Silicon Valley. And you also got to work with Paul Graham, who is legendary in Silicon Valley. Talk us through that. How did you end up in Y Combinator?

Brett Hagler:

Well, I'll preface it by saying ... Because what I'm going to say after this, it sounds fancy. So, what I want to preface it by saying is that, I definitely consider myself the same way now. But even before, I was very much an underdog. I did not come from a prestigious background whatsoever. I didn't go to a fancy school. I had a failed startup before I applied. I started New Story when I was 24, about to turn 25. And so, I didn't come from any kind of fancy background with all these accolades. And then, when I got to Y Combinator, I definitely felt for the first time extreme imposter syndrome and really felt like, "Whoa, I'm in a whole new league." And that motivated me. And I think from a ... There's a whole nother side of that from a faith perspective that was amazing.

Brett Hagler:

But I'll preface it by saying that. And for those that aren't familiar with Y Combinator, yeah, it's regarded as by far the world's top startup accelerator and venture capital fund. And so, for those that don't know, they've produced companies such as Airbnb, DoorDash, and Coinbase, which is about to go public. Coinbase is one of the largest IPOs since Facebook. And Coinbase, which is a cryptocurrency, basically you're able to buy cryptocurrency on the Coinbase platform. Right now, the valuation of that company ... And I don't know when this will come out, so it may change. But it's more than Goldman Sachs. And they were started 10 years ago. And we went through the program about six years ago. And when we applied, there was almost 10,000 startups from around the world that applied.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's nasty competition there. I mean, to even get a hearing at Y Combinator is extraordinary.

Brett Hagler:

Yeah. Yeah, they say it's harder to get in than Harvard, Stanford, and the Navy SEALs combined. And so, anyways, we got in. We were one of the first non-profits to go through the program. There was a lot of bold prayer that I think helped. But there was also just extraordinary preparation, you know? They have an infamous interview, where if you get to the final interview phase, they only invite ... I think for us, it was about 300 companies out of 10,000. And they invited 300 companies to Mountain View. They fly

people from all over the world, Brazil, China, India, all over the US, Canada. And you only have 10 minutes for the interview, Carey. And what we did, which has become a mantra kind of at New Story, and I think why we got in with my co-founders is, we prepared well over 100 hours for 10 minutes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow.

Brett Hagler:

And that was kind of the underdogness, and I just believe that preparation begets confidence. And we just-

Carey Nieuwhof:

How did you prepare? What did you do for those 10 minutes?

Brett Hagler:

Oh gosh, we could kind of figure out what were the questions? You can ask alumni that have gone through. And you know kind of the questions they're going to ask. And there was different blogs online. There were all types of forms of ... There was like all these little fake games with Paul Graham's kind of head on it. And he would ask questions and you would have 10 seconds to answer. So, we just ... We prepared and practiced like crazy.

Brett Hagler:

And when we got there, we were really confident. And we did really well. And so, that was one of the reasons that we got in. But to get back to your point of going for the fences, we made ourselves very vulnerable, right? Because we knew that doing all of this, there was still pretty much a less than 1% chance we were going to get in, right? But we were the ones that said, "Hey, despite that, we're still truly going to give it our all." Like, we were going to leave it out on the field, knowing that close to a 99% chance we weren't going to get in. And we still put in all that effort. And we got in. And that really changed the trajectory of New Story, because we were one of the first non-profits to go through the program. And we learned the exact same principles that Airbnb was learning a couple of years before us, Coinbase, DoorDash, Dropbox, other multi-billion dollar startups now. We were learning the exact same principles.

Brett Hagler:

And the best part about the program was, it wasn't like, "Oh, these are the non-profit or the charity people. Like, let's put them in a separate group and have them think about things differently." No.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, we'll make it easier for you guys.

Brett Hagler:

No. It was literally like the exact same thing, right? You were held to the exact same standard. And that was always what I wanted it to be like, right? That's why, going back to why we called it New Story, I was frustrated that I ... And I was entrepreneurial before New Story, I would look at some tech companies or startups and I would see a certain standard, a certain level of talent, a certain level of innovation and all

these things that got me excited. And then, I would look at some traditional non-profits and it just felt so different. And I'm like, "It doesn't have to be this way," right? I mean, you're up against significant challenges for sure, just because the industry has somewhat gone stale in that regard, right? But I think it was a great opportunity to shake it up. And so, we learned from the best of the best. And I have a couple principles I can share with you that we learned.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, totally.

Brett Hagler:

Yeah. So, the big value of going through the program, which was the summer of 2015, it was about a three month program. We were there in person. And I mean, it's the most you'll ever work in three months, right? It's not sustainable, but it's like you're all out for three months. And a couple of-

Carey Nieuwhof:

And once you're accepted, you go in there and it's an incubator, right? Where you learn ... What are you learning while you're in Y Combinator?

Brett Hagler:

You're learning how to basically go from a really good idea with maybe a couple customers, to getting your first ... It could be your first thousand customers, it could be your first million dollars in revenue. It's how are you really getting off the ground. And Airbnb went through and they were still in credit card debt, right? Like they-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, there's the famous story about Obama flakes and all that stuff that they'll tell. Yeah.

Brett Hagler:

That's right. And so, one of the stories they told us, which I think definitely applies still now and to leaders listening, the principle is do things that don't scale, which is very counterintuitive, right? Because in the early days, most people think, "Oh, I have to engineer this so that it's perfectly scalable." And you try to figure all of that out. And that can really paralyze you and it can stop you from getting started, right? And so, what Airbnb did was, they figured out, "Okay, if we," ... In the early days, "If we use professional photography to take photos of inside our homes, that has a much better conversion rate," right?

Brett Hagler:

Well, instead of Airbnb hiring this big team and figuring out all these things out, their founders would literally fly from San Francisco to New York and themselves would take photos, right? Of inside the homes, right? Which is the most unscalable thing to fly from San Francisco to New York. What you are doing is, you're proving that this is something people want and this is working. And then, you of course hire some contractors for photography, etc. right? What New Story ... Go ahead, sorry.

Carey Nieuwhof:

No, I was going to say, I didn't realize that do things that won't scale is actually a Y Combinator value. I'd heard that for many years. So, that was my next question. What did you guys do? What did you do that didn't scale?

Brett Hagler:

Well, the first thing we did was, our entire ... We had a crowdfunding platform in the beginning. So, the donor could directly connect with the family on our crowdfunding site, right? So, you could see their picture, see their story. And there was like a crowdfunding meter, and everybody's familiar with crowdfunding. But we wanted it to look like it was our own platform, right? It wasn't ... We weren't using GoFundMe or somebody else, our own. Well, to build your own crowdfunding platform with code and everything takes time and is expensive. And we didn't have time and we didn't have money. So, we basically just made a bunch of different screenshots that were landing pages. And every time somebody donated, they clicked a button and there was no automation on the backend. We would go in and update a screenshot to make the meter move a little bit whenever there was a donation. And we would manually change the amount of money that was being donated to that family.

Brett Hagler:

So, the whole website was done that way. But what it proved was people wanted to directly connect with families, right? It proved that we could get donations. We got our first almost 100 houses funded that way.

Carey Nieuwhof:

No way.

Brett Hagler:

Which is a whole village. Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And you were manually updating the progress bar every single time?

Brett Hagler:

That's right. Our founders had to carry our computers with us everywhere we went so we could update it. And sometimes people would call and be like, "Hey, I just donated \$500. I didn't see the meter move. What happened?" And we would say, "Well, sometimes credit card processing takes a few hours. We promise it will be updated," which was ... We were getting the donations, right? It was just the interface we were using, we were doing manually. And so, that was one thing that of course doesn't scale, right? But we very quickly got it off the ground, got traction, proved this was something people want. One of the ways we got into Y Combinator was doing that, right? So, that was one thing we did.

Brett Hagler:

And the other thing we did was, we really wanted people to have an amazing donor experience with us. And there was this phrase they taught us at Y Combinator that it's better to have a thousand people love you than a million people kind of like you. And so, what we would do for as long as we could, at the end of every day, my two co-founders and I, Matthew and Alexandria, we would ... Whoever donated that day, we would send personal videos to them at the end of every single day just saying, "Hey, Carey.

Thanks so much. These are the co-founders of New Story. We're so grateful for your donation." And a short video, but it made it very personal. And dude, people told their friends about it, they put it online. So, again, one of the most unscalable things, but it really helped get our first thousand people that really loved the mission and love New Story. So, those were two examples.

Brett Hagler:

And the last one I'll share, which is a different mantra, really around kind of one of the best things Y Combinator does is they force you to think so much bigger than you thought was possible, right? And so, what they made us do was, when we got to Y Combinator, at the end of your three months, every company has to have one metric that they are going to aim for. And they ask you to set that metric. It could be revenue, it could be users, whatever it might be, right? And they say, "Come to us and make it as ambitious as you possibly can." And so, we sat around and we ended up saying, "Okay, in three months, for us to do 50 houses in three months would be insane," because before that we had done 10. And it would be like insane. And they were like, "Great. You're going to do 100."

Brett Hagler:

And so, they made us in a second where we already thought we were thinking so big, they double that, which at first felt seemingly impossible. But what it did is it changed how ... The only way we could do 100 houses in basically 100 days, that was the campaign we ran, was we had to think about ... We had to approach it differently, right? We had to talk to different people. We had to go out act with different press. And so, it forced you to say, "Okay, if I had to hit this goal, if I had to, what do I need to do?" And we ended up-

Carey Nieuwhof:

It breaks all your systems, right?

Brett Hagler:

Yeah. And we ended up doing over 100 homes. And it formed a value that we have at New Story that we say, think big, break down, execute. And so, we really try to stretch ourselves of, how are we thinking big. And then, let's reverse engineer that to what needs to happen. And then, let's be the best we can at executing. So, those are a couple of the stories. And then, I have a good story with Paul Graham as well.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay. Yeah, I do want to talk about that. Was Paul in the 10 minute interview? Or was that someone else from Y Combinator?

Brett Hagler:

No. They had a few other partners. So-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay, before you get to Paul then, can I ask you, can you give us an example of the kind of question they'd ask you in the 10 interview? You prepared 100 hours for this. What would be either actual or typical kind of question you would get in that 10 minutes?

Brett Hagler:

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So, I'm the CEO, I have two co-founders, if Brett died tomorrow, who takes over the company? Right? That'd be a question. How does this get to a billion dollar company within five years?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh yeah, that's cool. And then, you can't do the eight minute tap dance.

Brett Hagler:

No.

Carey Nieuwhof:

How long are your answers?

Brett Hagler:

Ideally, you need to answer like less than 15 seconds.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow.

Brett Hagler:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay.

Brett Hagler:

So, you kind of know what they're going to ... Somewhat know what they're going to ask. And so, you just need to really be prepared with your answers.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So it's like lightening round?

Brett Hagler:

Yeah. So, we ended up meeting ... So, Paul Graham was one of the founders with his wife, Jessica Livingston.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Can you give a quick bio for Paul, for people who may not know why he's so legendary?

Brett Hagler:

Sure. Yeah. I mean, he's now arguably ... I mean, there's a list of some amazing investors. But he's arguably the best early stage investor in the history of startups in venture capital, right? Especially what's happened now. Like, all these companies that are coming out now, Y Combinator's only been around for, I think maybe 15 years. Like, it's still really early. And so, all these companies that are now

going public, Airbnb, DoorDash, Stripe, these are going to be massive companies over the next decade. And so many of them were started out of Y Combinator. And Paul was the one that picked them. Like, he's the best picker of talent and of companies that have a chance to become multi, multi, multi-billion dollar companies that will literally change the world, and it's happened.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, yeah.

Brett Hagler:

Like, over and over and over and over again. And so, that's a little ... And then, he also has ... I would highly recommend, he has a great blog of essays that, if you just Google Paul Graham essays, that are all about startup thinking, mindsets, principles, lessons that a lot of folks in kind of the entrepreneurial world, they all ... They read, they learn. And so, he's great.

Carey Nieuwhof:

He's guru.

Brett Hagler:

The best, yeah. And when we got there, Paul, he had just retired full-time, but still involved. And we basically got one meeting with him. And obviously we're super nervous, had everything. We had like our website and exactly where we wanted to take him through the website and show him and get his advice. And as soon as we started, he just grabs my co-founder's computer and is like, "Let me look." And he just starts going through and just ripping everything apart, right? Just like-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Like destroying it and destroying you?

Brett Hagler:

Yeah, just destroyed it, "Make this simpler. This is too slick. Come on, you guys could write better." So, he's just pushing you to be better, right? And at the end of it, which is all very valid, great advice that of course we did. At the end of him giving that kind of direct feedback, he also said, "Oh, and here's a check for five houses," which was a lot of money. So, that was awesome. And I think one of ... The last thing I'll say about Y Combinator and Paul Graham was Paul Graham was really great and still is obviously amazing at, he really pushes you to think not like 10 times bigger, but 100 times or even 1,000 times bigger.

Brett Hagler:

And he has the ability to overcome the obstacles and challenges that many people would get caught up on, right? So, for Airbnb or for Coinbase, right? People would say, "Oh, there's so many regulatory problems and there's so many issues. Like, come on, that's just going to be the biggest pain. There's no way they could do that. They're just a small startup." He has the ability, like he knows that's real, but he has the ability to block that out and just think, "No, what if the founder's vision actually comes real?" Right? And what if Airbnb actually is the largest hospitality company in the world? And what would it take to get there?

Brett Hagler:

And I know there's going to be all these crazy challenges, but he's able to see that. And for us, I remember him just asking, like ... This was when we only were working in Haiti. We've now expanded, you know? "What would it take to just house everybody in Haiti?" And telling us, "Make a plan for that," you know? And there's just not that many people that push you to think that way.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That is fascinating. Where do you think, if you hadn't been through Y Combinator, what do you think New Story would have become? Or where would you be now?

Brett Hagler:

Yeah, I absolutely ... I just have so much gratitude for Y Combinator and the network there. I think my mindset was, if we get in, we're going to make the most of the opportunity. And we did, right? And we did with our work ethic, with getting our network of supporters that were mostly in the venture capital or tech world. That's how we got off to our start. And where we'd be today, I think we would just be probably a few years behind. That'd be my guess. Like, for the numbers we're at today, it'd probably be like two and a half, three years behind, I guess. So, not bad.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But it's a big accelerator.

Brett Hagler:

Yeah. It was just, the DNA of it was so amazing.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Brett, I'm looking at your advisors, your board. You have the co-founder of Reddit, the CEO of Glassdoor, Scott Harrison of charity:water, the co-founder, one of the co-founders of Kiva on your board or advisory team. What have been some keys to developing and nurturing relationships at that level?

Brett Hagler:

So, I want to tell one quick story about Scott and Vik Harrison. And then, hopefully they'll let us share it. I haven't shared this publicly. But so, actually, Scott Harrison's now an advisor, and Vik Harrison, his wife, who is the creative director and co-founder of charity:water, is on our formal board of directors. So, they play a significant role in New Story and they're amazing.

Brett Hagler:

But just an early story, I had a startup before New Story that basically ... That failed. But that startup led me to Haiti and also forming a small partnership with charity:water, which is how I met Scott and Vik. And they definitely had an influence on me, right? And after that first startup failed, before starting New Story, I actually was thinking about going and working for charity:water and potentially working with Scott. And it got down to kind of the final, final, final round. And in my head, I was pretty convinced I had the job. And I got a no at the last minute.

Brett Hagler:

And when that happened, I was young. I was 23, 24. Looking back, was definitely way too experienced for the role. But when I got the no, I mean, I remember being so devastated because I thought, "This is why my first startup failed. This is a great opportunity to work for and learn from an incredible leader and mentor and role model." And I was just so devastated. And I remember, the first thing I did was, I just got on my knees and I just cried out to God. And I was like, "I have no clue why this is happening. It is horrible. But I'm going to trust that you have something else in mind that could be better." And New Story started about four months after that.

Brett Hagler:

So, it's just an encouragement to folks that sometimes when you feel like you've really got knocked down or something really didn't go the way that you planned, if you persevere and have faith, you never know how the dots can connect. And you can only connect the dots looking back. So, anyways, now we have-

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's a great story.

Brett Hagler:

... An amazing friendship. We've got an amazing friendship. Scott's on our advisory board. Vik's on our formal board of directors. We love charity:water. So, it's cool how everything kind of worked out. But as far as our other ... Some of our other supporters and folks that are on our advisory board or team, I would break it down in a couple ways, Carey. I would say, to start, I really wanted to focus on kind of the tech and venture capital world. We've expanded now. It's not the only place people should learn from, right? But kind of being in San Francisco, going through Y Combinator, I wanted to focus there.

Brett Hagler:

And so, one is just having a niche that you can really build relationships in and build some kind of brand or credibility in, right? And so, by having that niche, these different founders or executives or CEOs or venture capitalists, they knew the other folks that were involved, right? And so, it was really easy when I said, "Hey, these folks are involved," or they could refer me to somebody else. It was a niche that they were familiar with. And so, we started really small. But then we built momentum because we focused so much on that niche. So, that would be the first thing is find a niche.

Brett Hagler:

The second thing was, I became ... And kind of before New Story, I already was. But I became even more of an obsessive learner in kind of the startup and the tech industry. So, I could speak their language. They would tell me the same way that other for-profit founders could speak their language, right? And so, it was very just kind of from the inside out. Like, I loved it. I was learning from it. And I could really speak their language. And that came from just the books, what I was learning, who I was learning from. And so, that learning posture really helped.

Brett Hagler:

The next thing would be, because of that, I was able to talk to them like a peer, right? And I think sometimes a charity, whether you're a charity or a church leader, you could easily fall into trying to come off as humble. Obviously humility's super important. But you really need to be able to have

confidence and talk like a peer, right? From founder to founder or CEO to CEO, I think that brought just ... They respected that. And then I would-

Carey Nieuwhof:

And you'd done the homework, right? You'd listened to the podcast, you'd read the books, you'd been to the events. You took notes.

Brett Hagler:

Yeah. Totally. And then, I would also ... I remember, we would have, every now and then, there'd be a moment where I knew I'd have a chance to maybe speak for 30 seconds or 60 seconds, right? In front of a crowd or an audience or at a dinner. And this is how, actually, we got to one of our board members now, Robert Hohman, who's the founder and CEO of Glassdoor. So, there was a gathering at the former CEO of DocuSign's home. I was invited because I knew this gentleman named Keith Crock, really through my best friend, Mike Arrieta. And anyways, I knew that he would make everybody go around and give like a 60 second intro, right? And so, instead of just kind of laying it up and kind of being lame and being like, "Hey, I'm Brett, I work at a charity that builds houses," I ended up practicing an impersonation of the DocuSign CEO at the time, named Keith. And I would practice, practice, practice before, hoping that it would come off funny, because I had done it a couple of other times with him. I knew that he knew it was ... He blessed it. He thought it was fine, it was cool to do.

Brett Hagler:

And so, I would get up and kind of do this impersonation, where I'm not really like a funny guy whatsoever. But it was a kind of vulnerable, risky thing to do, to get up in front of all of these very accomplished leaders and CEOs and try something like that, right? And I was able to, I guess somewhat pull it off. And people would come up to me after and be like, "Dude, that was funny. That was great. Let's get coffee." And Robert Hohman, who's the founder of Glassdoor, was one of those, right?

Brett Hagler:

So, I think, I don't know, the lesson is just make the most of the opportunities and try things that make you vulnerable and that are risky but have a chance to get someone's attention in a different way. And obviously impersonating people isn't the way to do that. I've kind of retired from that. But just an example of, to answer your question, how did some of these folks in the beginning get involved with us?

Carey Nieuwhof:

What did you learn from your failed startup? You mentioned the no from charity:water. But you look back at that, and almost every leader, myself included, have had some stumbles. What was your failed startup? And what did you learn from it?

Brett Hagler:

So, it was an online eCommerce startup. And we were trying to kind of like curate different brands that were hard to find. And the value prop was we would show somebody a new jean or shirt that they didn't know about yet, but they wished they knew about. And then, we would give a percentage of that to two charities that we were working with. One of those charities was charity:water. Another ... But this was all very small. Like, we were not a big contributor or anything. And then, another charity was one in

Haiti. And we ended up wanting to go to Haiti to see the charity in person, because we were going to be giving back a little bit of the money we were making to the charity.

Brett Hagler:

And when I got to Haiti, that's when I was exposed to the problem that New Story was solving, right? And so, I never in a million years thought that's what I would be doing, you know, in my early 20s. Right around that time, right before going to Haiti and starting the first startup was when I personally had just a revived faith. And I made a kind of total 180 from that standpoint, which really changed everything from a values and heart standpoint of taking a lot of the selfish ambition that I had before and trying to use that for some better purposes that I felt I was called to.

Brett Hagler:

And so, during that first startup, I learned so many lessons of what not to do. We ended up basically failing. We were able to give back some of the venture capital money we raised. So, it wasn't a total failure on paper. It was almost like a breakeven. But, Carey, I learned so much from age 22 to 24, even though it was a failure, that there's no way I could have learned that anywhere else, right? I learned how to raise venture capital. I learned how to strike up partnerships with really credible people. And I had to put a pitch deck together for that. I had to be in the room pitching these leaders and CEOs.

Brett Hagler:

And so, while I don't think that the business idea was definitely not great. And I think the business idea was somewhat forced. That would be a lesson is like, don't force something. I think I was so excited just to start something and be entrepreneurial that I think we kind of forced the idea. Like, the idea wasn't that strong and we shut down. But the benefits were, it put me in certain rooms and situations where I was also forced to figure things out that I would have never had to figure out if I was more so at a regular job or at a regular company, right? And so, it definitely sharpened me. It grew me a lot as a young leader. And it kind of ... God connected the dots to where that failed startup ended up being the reason why my New Story was created.

Carey Nieuwhof:

One of the other things that amazes me about New Story is, you go onto your page, you look at your team, everyone's young, everyone's dynamic. Like, there's a talent war. I know we just went through whatever 2020 was. But there's a talent war on. How do you find, attract, and keep bright young leaders?

Brett Hagler:

So, with attracting, one, I would say first of all, we are trying to mature in our age demographic.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Everyone's too young. You need a couple of older folks.

Brett Hagler:

Well, yeah. I mean, I've learned there is significant value in bringing on experienced folks. And that can happen in the early stages. But for us, we're kind of trying to go now from about 40 people to maybe being closer to 90 or 100 in the next two years, right? So, it's time to bring on some people that are

much more experienced. So, I'll preface by saying, experienced people are amazing and are super important, right?

Brett Hagler:

In the beginning, and we'll still have a lot of young talent. We did start with a lot of young talent. And I think in attracting them, it kind of goes back to a little bit of what I was saying before, that bold ideas attract bold people. And so, I think the more unashamed you could be and have clarity in where you're going and why, and clarity on the kinds of people that work here, whether that's a manifesto or an ethos or your values, we just were unashamed to just say what we wanted and the kinds of people that New Story is for. And so, that repels a lot of people. And it's not to say it's right or wrong, it's just they may not want that, right? But by having clarity and really putting it out there, you will attract the kind of people that you're sharing, right? So, that's the first thing in attracting that we've learned is have clarity, be bold.

Brett Hagler:

The second thing is, you get to decide, do you want to have ... We call it a high talent density, right? And do you want to have a standard where you're trying to recruit really top talent, right? So, there are, of course, trade-offs that come with that, right? You're going to be paying people more. You're going to be expected to have certain benefits. Like, there are trade-offs that come with that. But we decided pretty early on that we wanted to attract very talented people that, if they wanted to, they could be working at some of these other great startups or tech companies, right? And that was kind of always my mindset or filter was, does this person have the competency and some of the same drive that some of his or her other peers have at some of the companies I was mentioning before, right?

Brett Hagler:

And it's not to say, everybody doesn't have to come from a tech or startup background. That's not what I'm saying. But I wanted to ideally have the same kind of persona of a person that would join one of those companies. And when you get like-minded people into the culture, into the team, one thing we've learned by being such a mission driven organization where we help the extreme poor, right? That's what we do. What I've learned is, whether it's a church or whether it's a non-profit with a great mission is there are, I mean, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of great missions around the world, right? And so, it's obviously someone ... They need to be very attracted and very passionate about your mission. But that's not going to be the main thing that keeps and retains people, that's the only thing, right? If your selling point is, "We're changing people's lives. We're doing ..." Like, that's awesome, right?

Carey Nieuwhof:

But we pay crappy and have a terrible culture, and all those things. It's not going to work.

Brett Hagler:

Exactly.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Brett Hagler:

Exactly. It's like, really good, especially young talent, they want to be around people that are going to sharpen them and make them better, right? And so, they want to be stretched. And it's not to say ... We actually do have a very healthy work-life balance, right? It's not to say, "Hey, you need to work 60, 70, 80 plus hour weeks." It's not that. It's, "When you're here and when you're working, we're intentionally going to challenge you and stretch you. And we want you to have some of the most growth oriented years of your career while you're with us here," right? And so, that is attracting the kind of person that wants that, right? And then, we have to do our job of then, "Okay, well we want to bring in great manager training. We want to bring in resources that are going to help these people grow." But that's on some of the attraction side that we've learned.

Brett Hagler:

And the last thing I'll say is, one of the things that we prioritize from the very beginning, like from the first year or the first summer of New Story was our culture and our team. And the amount of investment that comes through and allocation of time and budget that goes into our culture and our team is significantly high, right? It's a big investment. But I think there's no greater investment for the return you get, right? So our-

Carey Nieuwhof:

What does that look like? How do you do that?

Brett Hagler:

Well, for us, the ROI is the amount of people that we can impact, right? So, if we're investing into recruiting great people, into creating a culture that they love, that is helping them grow, that is stretching them, then because they're very talented and they have high competence and they're growing, their output is going to be that much better than if we did not invest as much into that person and into the culture, right? So, for us, it's really our annual goals. And the progress that we're making is the return that we get to see.

Brett Hagler:

And when people talk about, "Hey, how do I be more innovative?" Which we may talk about later, the number one reply that I give is, "You need to have a culture that attracts and retains people that have competence to innovate and be creative." And when you make those investments, then you get ... We've seen really great returns. I think the most strategic thing that I can do as a leader to set up New Story for where I want to go this next decade, which is, we think, pretty bold, is create one of the best cultures and attract the best talent in the world. Like, that's a lofty goal, but if we get that right, then we're in a better position to do all the other things to accomplish our mission and impact more people.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You know what? I feel like this is round one. We're going to have to have you back just to unpack it, because we could double click on so many of these answers and take it down. I want to cover a couple of other subjects, probably rather briefly.

Brett Hagler:

There's challenges and trade-offs, right? So, if you want to have ... We've learned that it's not going to be perfect. You're going to have what we call ... It's better to have false positives than false negatives.

So, we'd rather take a chance on somebody and maybe not have it work out, than not take a chance on that person and miss out on somebody that could have really great potential. So, it won't be perfect. It has growing pains, especially if it's a younger team, which means you need to supplement that with great management. And then, also a younger team, there's usually going to be more turnover over time, right? And I think it's just the reality. Some people are going to want to go to business school. Some people are earlier in their lives and they may have a change of heart for what kind of industry they're going to be in. So, there's certainly trade-offs. But yeah, we started off with a young team, and now we want to balance that out.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay, I feel like that's its own podcast episode, so I'm going to put a pin in that for the future.

Brett Hagler:

Sure.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay, we've talked a lot about innovation. Almost every leader wants to innovate or knows, you know what? I should. So, let's talk about general principles. And then, because we have a lot of people who are invested in the church, I want you to specifically speak to the church as well. But let's start macro. Anybody like restaurants have had to innovate or should be innovating. Gyms have had to, small businesses that have been slammed by the pandemic. Charities, I've talked to a number of people who are executive directors of charities. They're just like, "The model just isn't working anymore." If they need to innovate, what are some principles that can really help?

Brett Hagler:

The first thing I would encourage folks with is encouraging you that innovation is a choice. You don't have to be Elon Musk, you don't have to be some brilliant MIT grad. You don't have to have this impressive background of all these exciting innovations. I really do think it's a choice. And if you're a leader, you can be intentional about the goals you're setting, how you're allocating your budget, right? What amount of your budget is going towards trying something new or being creative or R&D or innovation, right? Your budget so much is actually your business, right? And so, you get to decide how you're going to allocate that. And then, you also get to decide, who are you going to hire, right?

Brett Hagler:

So, if you're somebody that maybe doesn't think of yourself as the most innovative person, that's fine. There's a lot of great CEOs that are not that. But if they want to have a more innovative culture, they know that they need to bring on somebody that is. And so, could hire a really great ... Whether it's somebody on your executive team or maybe a VP or somebody younger. And you have the ... Like, you can do that, right? So, that's the first thing I would say, Carey, is it's a choice. It doesn't have to be mystified that innovation and creativity is this thing for a select few. I really don't think that because that wasn't me. And it's not a lot of my peers. It's just, we've made choices to do that. So, that would be the first thing I'd say.

Brett Hagler:

The second thing is, you have to have the guts to try something knowing that it might not work, right? Like, you have to have the guts and the vulnerability to actually try it. And to think through, not just all the things that could go wrong, right? Is that an important exercise? Of course. And you need to be calculated and you need to think through, what are the challenges? What are the obstacles? What are the roadblocks? Sometimes those are going to be too strong and you shouldn't do it, right? But you really need to think through with your leadership team, "What if this idea actually works? And do we have the guts to take a step and try it and make our best effort?"

Brett Hagler:

And so, that's the other thing I would say is, so many people just don't have the guts to just try something. And so, I would encourage you to do that. And then, the other thing, this is a little bit more if you're at a church. I would say, make the most ... It doesn't have to be at a church. It could be at a non-profit, it could be at a restaurant. Try to figure out who in your network or your audience or your base of customers or donors is more entrepreneurial and is more innovative, and bring them into the process, right? Invite them in. Pay them ... You probably don't have to pay them, but invite them in and say, "Hey, would you work with us once a month?" Put together an advisory board or council of folks that love coming to your restaurant and you kind of know are in whatever the more innovative field is, or that are at your church or that are supporting your non-profit, and ask them for help. I think that's another thing that everybody could do, right? It just requires trying-

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's so good.

Brett Hagler:

It requires knowing that you may not do it perfect. You may not know exactly what to say. But just be real and put yourself out there and try it. And so, those things of, it's a choice, you can set the budget. You can set who you hire. You can set your strategy. It's your choice. Have the guts to try it. And then, be shameless in asking for help. I remember Brian Chesky, who's the founder of Airbnb and CEO, one of the things he said to us when he came and talked to Y Combinator was, he's like, "I'm shameless in asking for help. I'll ask the best people around me I know for help." And if you're in any kind of role of leadership, especially if it's a charity or church or if you've been struggling, people want to help. And so, you need to identify, who are the good people that can help? And then, you need to ask them. Call them, email them, write them letters. I promise you, they will give you their time. But you have to be intentional about it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You know, I think that's so good, because it involves humility. And I mean, it was Jim Collins who famously said 20 years ago, right? That is a level five leader. It's like, yeah, you've got all the skills, but you also have the humility to go, "I don't know," or, "What can I learn from you?" Like, there's somebody ... I hired a performance coach, he's like, "You can learn something from everybody. What do you want to learn?"

Brett Hagler:

Totally.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right? Because often we get ourselves into these towers. It's like, "Oh, I'm supposed to be the expert, I'm supposed to know." It's like, I don't know. What would you say? Because this is definitely round one. I want to bring you back in the future. We can go a lot deeper on some of these things, Brett. It's been so, so good. But there are people leading organizations with a young Brett on staff, sitting in the back row at a church, you know? They're a member of your organization, they're a patron, they're a client. What would you say looking back on your life? What would you say to those leaders that's like, "Here's what you do if there's someone like me with some entrepreneurial zeal in them." What do we do with folks like you to engage their potential?

Brett Hagler:

I actually think this is one of ... I mean, if I was running a church or if I was on the board of a church, I think this is truly one of the best opportunities you can have to engage with your existing younger audience. It doesn't have to be younger, but it'd probably skew more younger. And also, people that are outside of the church as well, right? And I just think entrepreneurship and creativity from a faith perspective. Like, as Christians, that is ... The creative process, there's so much beauty in it, that as a leader, you can direct how people are treated, your employees, how products are made, how innovation is created with a redemptive frame and redemptive lens. Like, these are things that are so important as believers. And I think there's a massive opportunity for the church and for church leaders to engage more folks that are interested in entrepreneurship.

Brett Hagler:

And I'd also say that right now, entrepreneurship has never been cooler, right? It is something that young people love. And whether it's starting a company, or now you have the creator economy, right? Where you can make your own videos and your own ... Yeah, video shows, whether it's on YouTube or Patreon or TikTok. Like, entrepreneurship and being a creator for yourself is on the rise, is as cool and as attractive as it's ever been. And in my opinion, it's only going to get stronger this decade. And so, why not as a church help cultivate that, right? And help create resources that young people ... I keep saying young. Anybody in your audience can learn from and be attracted to, and also people outside of your church.

Brett Hagler:

So, a few practical things that I would recommend that I would do. One, I mean, you could start some kind of program inside the church that connects mentors and mentees together, right? Hey, if you care about entrepreneurship or creating, we can set up that program, right? And you could probably have ... If you don't have enough bandwidth on your staff, you could probably have a volunteer set that up, right? So, it's just a program where you can connect mentors and mentees.

Brett Hagler:

The second thing I would do is, I would create some type of mini-series. And it doesn't have to be on Sundays. It could be like a three-week series at the church or somewhere else, where you're inviting, whether it's a guest entrepreneurial speaker, or maybe you have one person kind of run the program. And then, you're just inviting people from your congregation or from the community at large to come learn about entrepreneurship, and to also meet other people that are interested in entrepreneurship or a more creative or different path.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's good.

Brett Hagler:

That's how I met one of my co-founders. I met one of my co-founders at a social entrepreneurship meetup, right? And I was going to ... I don't mean this in any other wrong way, because I absolutely love this church and it changed my life. I was going to Buckhead Church, right? And I still go to Buckhead Church, love it. It's an amazing organization in Atlanta. And I was just thinking, "There are so many people in the audience here that probably care about entrepreneurship or are excited and want to connect with others that are believers that also care about that." So, you could create a multi-week series and just try it out. Have somebody run it that's entrepreneurial, where people can come and learn about entrepreneurship and also meet other people, right? So, that's something I would do.

Brett Hagler:

And the last thing is, I would maybe create some type of just simple library of resources and content. And that could be certain videos, books, podcasts, where somebody in your congregation could go to if they want to learn and improve. So, those are some of the easy things that I think anybody could do. And you could just start small and give it a shot. And I was just thinking myself back in the day, when I was 22, 23, obsessed with learning, of entrepreneurship, wanting to connect with other people. If the church could have provided that kind of outlet, I would have been ... I would have loved it. I would have been so happy and excited. I would have invited some of my friends. And I think that a lot of churches have that opportunity.

Brett Hagler:

And then I have other ideas that I think you could go even further. But we could save those for another time. So, yeah. Maybe, Carey, we could have some kind of-

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's incredible. Well, I am going to have you back. And let's do a sneak peek. What's one thing you're working on right now that feels like that 100X, 1000X, like, I don't even know whether we can pull this off?

Brett Hagler:

I mean, right now, the first quarter, have basically been putting a plan together of, how do we raise a billion dollars in a relatively short timeframe? Not in a year or a couple of years. But a real plan to do that before the end of this decade. And how do we house over a million people? Which would be about 250,000 homes, probably making us one of the largest home builders. And how do we create the most effective system in the world to house people in poverty that we prove it, and then we prove that system with the innovation, with the software, with how families will pay back some of that house? And it's a long list of how we do that. And then, how do we allow other governments and organizations around the world replicate a system that we've proven at scale for how to house a million people in poverty?

Brett Hagler:

So, those are some things that I'm working on right now. I'm also really working on, we're hiring. So, New Story's hiring a good amount this year. And we're trying to recruit some awesome people. So, those are two that we're working on.

Carey Nieuwhof:

How did you set that goal?

Brett Hagler:

How do we set the goal?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Brett Hagler:

So, it's hard sometimes when you're working on such a massive problem, you can get paralyzed and you can think like, "I've got to figure out how to do this for 1.6 billion people in 10 years," right? And the reality is, at some point, it breaks, right? There's a difference between trying to go to the moon or trying to go to Mars, and trying to go to a galaxy that is far beyond-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Far, far away. Yeah.

Brett Hagler:

Right? Like, it's just, at some point, you do need to be somewhat realistic, right? And so, when you have such a massive problem, sometimes you can get caught up in the TAM or the total addressable market of that problem. And what we wanted to do was, we said, "Okay, yes, of course. In our lifetime, we want to help as many people as possible." Hopefully hundreds of millions, which I think is possible, right? But to start, how do we set a really focused goal geographically, the price point of the home, where the partners are, how we're going to do repayments? And so, we had a mantra really heading into 2021 and beyond from a strategy standpoint that focus will set you free, right?

Brett Hagler:

And we were talking about, do we work in the US? Do we work in Africa? Do we do this? Do we get into government policy? Like, there's so many different ways to attack the problem. And we got clarity that success to us was focusing on creating the most effective system to house a million people in poverty. And we need to house a million people in Latin America specifically. Most will be in Mexico. And in doing that, we want to prove a model that then can be replicated by others to house millions elsewhere. So, the main thing we have to do is focus on being best in the world at that, and say no to everything else.

Brett Hagler:

And then, we just ... We picked trying to do that before 2030 as kind of your ... You mentioned Jim Collins, big Jim Collins fan. Like, that's our BHAG, you know? That's not the end. That's not the end, but it's a really great rally cry and milestone to get to. And if we can get there, then there's a lot of opportunities beyond that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, I had high hopes for this conversation, you blew past them all. So, thank you so much, Brett. People want to learn more about you or New Story, where can they go?

Brett Hagler:

I'm pretty active on Twitter. So, my Twitter is just BrettHagler. And then, New Story's URL is newstorycharity.org. We're hiring a lot right now. And of course, there's ways to get involved philanthropically as well, which you can see on the website or reach out to me. And if you're a church leader, I don't know, Carey, maybe we do a webinar or something. I would love to talk more about entrepreneurship inside your church and what are some ways that you could get started.

Brett Hagler:

The last plug I'll make is for an organization called Praxis. I don't know if you've heard of Praxis, Carey. But I went through Praxis as well after Y Combinator. And it was one of the best things I've ever ... It's also a ... It's an incubator, it's a fellowship. And they are on the leading edge of, they call it redemptive entrepreneurship, which is entrepreneurship through the lens of a believer in a redemptive way. And they have a really high standard. They do excellent work and they have excellent resources that you could go to and learn from as well or bring into your church. So, that's all I got for now.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow. There's a lot more there, Brett.

Brett Hagler:

Would love to connect with anybody. So, just reach out and see how we can help.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That was just fascinating at about 100 different levels. And yeah, I love having my mind blown by like ... I kept trying to get my head around 3D printing. Like, I mean, I've seen it. I haven't done any 3D printing. But when I actually saw a house 3D printed, and then we toured the factory, it was just insane. And I love that kind of innovation. In fact, in the What I'm Thinking About segment, I'm going to talk about ways to kill your innovation. I can do it very easily. And so, just a short clip at the very end of this podcast.

Carey Nieuwhof:

In the meantime, if you want show notes, you can go to careynieuwhof.com/episode419. We have free transcripts there. And we get to do all this because of our partners. And we pick them very, very carefully. If you haven't yet checked out what World Vision has for you, check out their new free series with Danielle Strickland by going to worldvision.org/carey. And get ready for the future, whatever it holds, by getting your free Generosity Pulse Report today, an exclusive offer for listeners of this show. Go to generis.com/carey.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Next episode, my good friend Mark Clark is back. We have been working on a big project. And we talk about ... Well, The Art of Better Reaching. It's getting harder and harder, and you know this. Like, churches are down on average about 28% year over year this year in terms of attendance. And that's

over pandemic levels. Yeah. So, there's been a bit of a leak. How do you reach new people when the culture is changing so quickly? Here's an excerpt from a conversation Mark and I did.

Mike Clark:

Like, can you in an informed way be able to defend the ideas of Christianity in the marketplace of conversation? And so, we want people to be able to be able to defend faith and actually think like that. Not just go, "Well, I've got my little bible study. I take my little Instagram photo. I think biblically, and that's all I do." It's like, "No, you know people in the world have questions. Can you answer any of those questions?"

Carey Nieuwhof:

And that's next time on the podcast. So, you can subscribe for free. Get it all automatically. And just thanks for your partnership in all this and for sharing on social. So grateful for you. A lot of guests coming up, subscribers. We have Allison Fallon, just did that interview. It is so amazing. Pete Scazzero is back, Steve Carter, Louie Giglio, Juliet Funt. Who else have we got? We've got Greg McKeown, just hit number one on the New York Times bestseller list. Anthony O'Neal, Ed Stetzer, so much more. And if you subscribe, you don't have to worry about it. I only listen to the podcasts I tend to subscribe to. So, if you haven't done that, you just stumbled on it, you can do that. And we're just so glad to have you as part of the tribe.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And now it's time for What I'm Thinking About. And innovation can be a challenge for all leaders. It's very easy, particularly when you get past the early struggle of starting up a company, starting up a church, to find a pattern, set it, forget it, and fall into an ultimately fatal or flat rhythm. So, how do you end up sabotaging your innovation? I want to leave you with a couple of ideas. One thing is to try to find normal quickly. Now, that's really important, okay? You've got to have a stable base. But for example, in the moment we're in as a culture. If you think of this, what happened in the last year and a half as just an interruption, not a disruption, I think that can be a problem because the world is changing rapidly. And if you're just like, "No, I'm going to go back to a set pattern. That was an interruption, not a disruption," I think you can pay a price for that down the road.

Carey Nieuwhof:

If the current crisis is a disruption, leaders who see it as an interruption should be prepared to be further disrupted. I think that's a good rule. The industry, so many industries, including ... And you heard Simon Sinek talk about that on the show, or you will shortly. I forget whether that episode has aired actually, as I record this. He says the church is ripe for disruption in a good way, to really advance the mission. So, think about that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Number two, settle for the changes you've made so far. Change is hard. And it's tiring. And so, you made some changes, you probably got some new things on deck for 2021. Maybe you're thinking about a few changes for next year. And then, you're like, "Okay, we've arrived. Let's just set it and forget it." That can be a mistake. Just because you found something that works, doesn't mean you've found what works best. And just because you've made progress, doesn't mean you've realized your potential.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Number three, and this is a huge one, particularly right now in this moment, let your fatigue make the decision for you. Yep, you're tired. Everybody is tired. But my fatigue is a terrible decision maker. And sometimes I've made decisions out of exhaustion. It's just, it's too much. I just can't handle it. And that's why self-care, which we talk about it a lot, is so important. It's just so important to take care of yourself. If self-care is important back in the old days, it's 10 times more important in where we are right now. So, don't let your fatigue make decisions for you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

The final one's kind of interesting. We talked about this a lot. It was a theme in the interview with Brett, is stop disrupting yourself, okay? Disruptions happen all the time. You don't need a global crisis, you don't need a pandemic. You don't need a weird economy. You don't need instability to be disrupted. Companies get disrupted all the time, you know? 100 years ago, it was carriage makers were in trouble because the car got invented. About a decade ago, you run a hotel chain. All of a sudden, this little upstart bunch of broke college grads couldn't pay their rent, decided to rent out an air mattress for \$80 and Airbnb is born.

Carey Nieuwhof:

The best leaders do not wait for circumstances to disrupt them. They decide to disrupt themselves. And here's the hard truth. I have to remind myself of this too. Leading a church that was true, now leading this company, that's true. I either disrupt myself or I get disrupted. So, why not disrupt yourself? I think that's hard in the moment. But it's so much easier longterm. Disrupt yourself or be disrupted.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Hopefully that was helpful. I'm so grateful to be on this journey with you. We'll catch you next time here on the leadership podcast. 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.