

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 456 of the podcast. It's Carey here, and I hope our time together today will help you thrive in life and leadership. Excited about today's show, because I know a lot of you ask me about, "Hey, I want to start my own podcast." Well, we're going to go into the origin stories of AJ Harbinger and Johnny Dzubak from The Art of Charm. They went from fledgling over a decade ago to over 250 million downloads, and we talk about that journey and a whole lot more on today's episode.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Today's episode is brought to you by Leadr. You can secure your space for the free webinar featuring myself, called The Great Resignation to the Great Resolution. It's happening November 30th, you can get your free download on how to run a better one-on-one meeting at leadr.com/carey. And by Medi-Share, they have a 98% customer satisfaction rating and an average member savings of 50% or more. Find out how much you could save by going to medishare.com/carey.

Carey Nieuwhof:

AJ and Johnny from The Art of Charm, I know a lot of you listen to that podcast, reached 250 million downloads recently. How do you get to that place? Well, we break it apart and I'll tell, you there's a lot of hustle and a couple of breaks and a lot of hard work and a long, long commitment to podcasting. And then they talk about how they built a whole business off of that. We also get into how to boost your confidence in communication, which is exactly what they talk about in The Art of Charm and at the end, I asked them for some advice to church leaders.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay, if the church was a client, what would you tell us to do? So if you're a church leader, lots of church leaders listen to this, I hope you find that enjoyable and it's fun afterwards too. They mentioned Oasis Church in LA and when we were talking about that and I'm like, "Well, do you know Erwin?" So I got to introduce Johnny and AJ to Erwin. It's a fascinating story. And for those of you who are involved in church world too, I think you'll find the end of the podcast really, really interesting because we go there and... Well, I hope you enjoy the conversation as much as I did.

Carey Nieuwhof:

AJ Harbinger was on the fast track, pursuing his PhD in Cancer Biology at the University of Michigan and working in the high pressure environment of a research lab. How do you go from that to being a top podcaster? Well, you're going to find out. And then Johnny, his first love was rock and roll. He was a musician and we talk about how he stepped away from music and how he got into The Art of Charm and more. Yeah, all that and a whole lot more on this episode.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Question for you. How are you investing in the care and development of your team? There is a great resignation happening and we're seeing more turnover and hiring seems to be harder than ever. Well, the answer to The Great Resignation is intentional care and development of your team. I believe in that 100%. That's why I want you to check out Leadr. It's spelled L-E-A-D-R, no second E and it's people development software that helps you engage and grow every person on your team. On November 30th, Leadr is hosting a free webinar called The Great Resignation to The Great Resolution. In the webinar, I will be there along with Leadr's senior vice president of growth, Holly Tate. During the webinar, you'll learn to create a culture that attracts and retains top talent, how to build personalized development plans for yourself and your team, and discover what the next generation is looking for, both in their boss and in their workplace, plus a whole lot more. Secure your space for the free webinar today and get your free download on how to run better one-on-one meetings at leader.com/carey.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Again, it's that time of year; open enrollment season. It's the dreaded yearly task of diving into a mountain of paperwork and research, trying to find the best healthcare options for you and your family. We all want to two things when it comes to our healthcare: trust and affordability. With a 98% customer satisfaction rating and an average member savings of 50% or more Medi-Share checks both of those boxes. Medi-Share is an affordable alternative to health insurance that allows members to share one another's medical bills. They offer access to over 900,000 healthcare providers and have a proven 27 year track record. They're also the most trusted name when it comes to healthcare sharing and have a quarter century of expertise that helps you sleep better at night. There's another thing about Medi-Share that's great, and that is that they're offering free and unlimited professional virtual counseling sessions to their members. I love that. Right now is the best time to make the switch. Find out how much money you could save by going to medishare.com/carey.

Carey Nieuwhof:

With all that said, let's dive into my conversation with Johnny and AJ from The Art of Charm.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well welcome The Art of Charm, Johnny, AJ. So good to have you today on the podcast.

Johnny Dzubak:

Thank you for having us, Carey. Very excited to be here today.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, and we did a mic flip. So you had me on your show, which was so kind, and it's so nice to be able to acquaint some of my audience with the two of you. And then also, a lot of people have been following for a long time. So in the world of podcasting, you are approaching 250 million downloads, which is mind blowing if you really think about it. But I want to go back into the backstory. So AJ, you were at the University of Michigan pursuing a PhD in, is it right?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Cancer biology-

AJ Harbinger:

Yeah It started in cellular molecular-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Not exactly the direct route to podcasting and coaching and all that stuff. Okay. what happened? Tell us about that.

AJ Harbinger:

So funny enough, much like many of our audience members, I got into graduate school essentially through a bit of a back door. So I was working on a research project out of college, trying to pad my med school application. So I really wanted to get into a top tier med school and fulfill my dad's dream of me becoming a doctor. And when I talked to my career counselor, she said, "Fulfilling your dad's dream is not really a great why when you go to interview for med school. So it'd be great to have some experience of your own to draw from." And I had a job in the hospital I did not enjoy. And I thought, "Well, let me try out research," as another way to have the extracurriculars, to be competitive and to getting into top tier med school. And my research project was essentially me working with a principal investigator who was a head and neck surgeon.

AJ Harbinger:

So I was on my own, and I'd go into the OR I'd take some samples. And then we created this really incredible animal model for head and neck cancer development. And we were trying to isolate cancer stem cells, which was a very trendy topic back then. And go to publish, I'd worked for a little over a year, had all this great data. And my boss, the principal investigator said, "Hey, we've been scooped by a high powered lab in Stanford, and we might not be able to publish our results." And it was very devastating to hear all this hard work, sweating it away in the animal room, trying to get the data together, and he made the decision for his career. Totally understandably. And how science works to partner up with Stanford, combine our data and get published. And in doing so, essentially I went from the potential to be the first author and received the credit and used that towards my med school application all the way, bumped down to third author, which in the science world, isn't that stellar doesn't really help your application.

AJ Harbinger:

And I felt really burned. I felt really let down. And my boss said, "Hey, I want to make it up to you, you did tremendous work on this project. Have you ever thought about just graduate school and entering a PhD program, because you doing this project on your own is what graduate students are doing. And you could get a degree and you could get a little bit of a stipend and get paid while doing it versus going into even more debt in medical school." And I grew up in a blue collar household. I paid my way through college, so that was pretty enticing offer. So I applied to the University of Michigan and I got in. And of course, once I got in everyone around me had wanted to be a PhD all their life, had multiple papers published were very excited and enthusiastic about their PhD work.

AJ Harbinger:

And I felt lost. And I struggled with imposter syndrome. I really felt like I got in through the back door. I didn't deserve to be there. And that had a cascade effect on my dating life, my social life. And I became pretty depressed in the process. And of course, like most young men, I really wanted to focus on my dating life. I felt if I could just get my mojo back, that I would have all this other success in my life. And I started a show at the time called The Pickup Podcast dedicated to getting results in your dating life. And

me and the co-host at the time in starting the show, we didn't think it was going to be anything that it is today. We certainly didn't come up with a snazzy name, like The Art of Charm them right out of the gate, but it resonated us documenting our journey, sharing our own struggles with women in the dating space, lacking in confidence and being two guys from the Midwest, we caught a little bit of fire, so to speak and the podcast started to take off.

AJ Harbinger:

And the co-host at the time was moving to New York City to pursue his first job out of law school. And he thought, "Hey, we have enough in our fan base who are interested in coaching. What if as a side hustle, we do some coaching on the side and make a little bit extra money? It would help me rent wise in New York City. And it'd help you supplement your grad school stipend." And I thought, "That's, that sounds great." So we started doing some coaching and it quickly became something that neither one of us could handle and the podcast kept growing. And we decided, "Hey, we don't just want to talk about dating let's rebrand and let's create a real coaching company and find some people to help us coach all of these show fans."

AJ Harbinger:

And in the process, we were advertising the show around Ann Arbor and we put some business cards out in men's bathrooms to try to get more listeners. And it just so happened that Google had just opened an office in Ann Arbor. And there was a big influx of Google people and they saw one of these cards and they checked out the podcast, shared it with the friend at Apple and Apple decided to feature us on the homepage in iTunes. And that created hockey stick growth. And the only reason I know that is because one night out in Ann Arbor, I'm having a conversation with a full table of people and being a little boisterous. And this gentleman comes up to me and says, "Hey, I know you from somewhere." And I'm like, "I don't know. I don't think you know me," I hadn't met him.

AJ Harbinger:

I was trying to get back to my group. He's like, "No, I recognize you have that podcast. I found your business card in this bathroom. And, I shared it with my buddy over at Apple and we love your show." And I was like, so that actually, what is the cascade that led to the show really taking off and in the process I decided to, drop out of graduate school much to my father's chagrin. And, that's when I had met Johnny and Johnny became our first coach at the company. And I went full-time with The Art of Charm. So did our co-host at the time Jordan and the company has grown since then. And we focus really on communication, which is helpful in dating obviously, but also helpful in your career. And I realized that that's what I wasn't bringing to the table in graduate school. And that's why I was struggling so much.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's a fascinating backstory. What year did you flip to The Art of Charm? And did Apple feature you on the homepage?

AJ Harbinger:

2009 we were featured on the homepage.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. So see, Cathy Heller has been on this show and she had a similar thing where it was struggle, struggle, "Don't know what I'm going to do with my life." Has a really fascinating backstory, started a podcast. And again, someone from Apple heard about her show, featured it on the homepage and then boom, like you said, hockey stick growth. Those are things you can't really count on. Right? So Johnny you're in the picture at this point, but some backstory because you weren't exactly studying a PhD in cancer biology, you were on a very different track in your life. Right?

Johnny Dzubak:

Very much so. I also have eight years on AJ. So a little bit ahead in age and experience in this time. And I had grown up in a household that was focused around music. It was a very arty household. My mom was a hairdresser. My dad was a blue collar... Was a factory worker, grew up in a very blue collar house. But my dad's side hustle was playing in the weekend band down at the bar, setting up in the corner and playing for four hours and three sets a night. And they used to rehearse at the house. And so no matter what my family was doing, music was on and it was discussed and it was talked about, and I would recognize the songs from the radio to the songs that were being performed in the basement with my dad's band.

Johnny Dzubak:

And then also at a time when MTV started going into the homes in the suburbs. And so music was always on where no matter where we were and the TV and the videos became the background music, if it wasn't for the radio. And, I always say that it's... I don't when you're young and all those pathways are open, you don't know which ones are going to the largest impact, but as a child. And you're feeling the reverberation through the floorboards of the music that is going on downstairs. I mean, the impact of that has shaped my whole life. And so from a very early age, I was on a mission. And that mission was to perform. That mission was to be like dad. That mission was to be a rockstar to play music. And at 21 years old, I moved to North Carolina to do just that.

Johnny Dzubak:

And I was... We were talking earlier and I brought this up on another podcast. I was going to Catholic school growing up. And by the time we hit middle school, sixth, seventh grade, I was already looking for other kids who were playing instruments, because I wanted to form a band. But none of the kids in Catholic school were in bands or interested in that sort of stuff. So I begged my dad to transfer me into public school because I thought there'd be more kids like me because I had exhausted everyone about playing in a band in Catholic school. And by the time I got to public school, I still had to wait a few years for the kids to not be able to make the football team or any of the varsity teams before they started looking for other ideas and what would lead them, the attention of girls, that's when kids start getting musical instruments for Christmas. I was already there.

Johnny Dzubak:

And even when they started, I had to become their teacher to show how to get them to catch up so we could play in a band, but that's how important it was to me. And at 21, I moved to North Carolina to begin my music career and on that mission, and I had a wonderful time and it was a blast and I was doing what I wanted to be doing. And I had organized my life so that every aspect of it had a toe in music somewhere. My job was a talent buyer and bar manager for a venue. When I wasn't working, I was either booking tours for myself or other bands and then being on the road and even with cell phones come out, I was on the road touring while phoning in and doing my work duties for the bar.

Johnny Dzubak:

But the music industry that surrounded me growing up began to rapidly change due to the technology that was coming out. This is moving in... Through the 90s that were moving into the 2000s. And that industry that I grew up wanting to be a part of was changing so rapidly. It was unrecognizable. Some could make the argument that it wasn't going to exist anymore. And I could see that happening. So this is a disruption that I had to start asking myself a lot of questions because I had been on a mission from an early age. I don't remember when I wasn't on that mission. There was no time to think about what I want to do that was done a long time ago. So with all this technology, the industry that I grew up wanting to be a part of changing so rapidly, I had hard questions to ask myself, we're talking about the philosophical journey earlier.

Johnny Dzubak:

I had hard questions to ask myself which needed to have honest, hard answers. And I chose self development as a way to look inward, to begin doing reflection, to figure out what the answers to those questions were. Now, up until that point, I lived my life wanting to be Keith Richards. And so you could imagine what sort of life I was putting together for myself, because that was what I was pursuing. But as I implemented some of the neat things that I learned in self development to reflect and learn a bit about myself, my life and how I felt about my life and my, my own enjoyment and happiness rapidly started escalating. It was incredible how implementing a few little ideas can change how I felt about things and how I, my perspective and how I engaged with the world around me.

Johnny Dzubak:

So for myself, it was, "Wow. I implemented these few ideas. I've gotten these results. What happens if I implement all of these ideas? What happens if I just immerse myself into self development?" One obsession rolled into the next and with self development, and all you start to realize about how influence works. And so as I was getting all these new results, my life was being enhanced. I was getting more enjoyment out of every day. I wanted to surround myself with people who were also involved with self development at the level that I was. And so that had led me into learning about some other companies and getting a job in DC, helping out with their programs, speaking to the young men that were going there. And that's how I met AJ as they were doing research, looking for coaches to help build what was going to be The Art of Charm.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, that's neat. So it's funny how so many of us who have ended up doing this. It wasn't really the career path. You kind of stumble in backwards to what you end up doing, what ends up defining you, which is why I love origin stories so much. So all of you, young leaders who are wondering, "How do I do this? How do I get 250 million downloads?" It's almost never a linear journey. Is it?

Johnny Dzubak:

No-

Carey Nieuwhof:

I mean, do you see that, because you've interviewed all kinds of people. Do you find that it's always circuitous?

Johnny Dzubak:

I just wanted to add one final point to that. That for AJ and myself, our interests outside of self development, never shifted. I for myself, I still play music. And I had been playing music this whole time. From bands, when we moved to New York, I was in bands. To Los Angeles, I was bands holding residencies at both cities and even find myself in making a record right now, here in Vegas. And the work that I had done on myself only enhanced my enjoyment and appreciation for the craft that I loved so much. And with AJ, it's the science that we have committed ourselves to for this company as well. And Carey, I'm sure you can understand that of the more you're getting out of life, and you turn that towards your interest, the more appreciation you have for them.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh yeah. Yeah. Anything else in those early days of Art of Charm that was really pivotal for you? Some pivotal moments. I mean, the breakup being featured on the homepage of Apple was huge. And I know the people who have experienced that, it's like, yeah. And nobody knows exactly how that works. Some business card in a bathroom in Ann Arbor ends up in Cupertino. And next thing you know, a million people show up. So that's kind of crazy, but any other pivotal moments for you guys?

AJ Harbinger:

So we land in New York City and of course we're out networking, rubbing shoulders, trying to meet new people, trying to grow the business and shake as many hands as possible. And Johnny and our co-host at the time end up at a party and get introduced to two hosts of a hit radio show on SiriusXM for young men, Covino and Rich. And they happened to have a producer of their show who was a little unlucky when it came to dating and was kind of downtrodden and was the butt of the jokes around the studio. And when they heard what we did, that we helped men like him gain confidence, become better in terms of showing up professionally, building deeper relationships, as well as success and dating.

AJ Harbinger:

They invited us on the show mostly to make fun of us, but maybe potentially on an off chance, we could actually help their producer make something of himself and move out of his mom's basement. Literally he was living in his mom's basement and we said, "We'll do it. We'll take on that challenge." We saw this as an opportunity to get exposure in New York City. A SiriusXM radio station is asking us to come on as a guest. So they go on the show and the audience responds incredibly well. The two hosts, not so much, find what we're saying not as compelling, but they had options. They were confident. That's why they had the microphone.

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

AJ Harbinger:

But the producer ended up taking training with us, coming to our facility in New York, sitting through some classes. And within two months he had moved out of his mom's basement. And everyone at Sirius XM noticed a difference in his demeanor, the way he was carrying himself, the way he was looking people in the eyes and coming into work. And they said, "We got to do something with these guys. We don't know what it is yet, but there's something here." And they decided to give us a dead hour of air. They said, "We have now grown our channel list so large that we don't have enough coverage. We'll give you guys a dead hour," which is when there's no coverage, "you take callers and give the same advice you've been giving on this show and if it hits, you guys will have your own show."

AJ Harbinger:

So with no radio experience, no broadcast journalism background, we take a dead hour. It turns into two hours. It turns into a show on Sirius XM, all based on our ability to go from the podcast to actually change lives of the callers and the clients who've come through the program. So that gave us a huge leg up and credibility and ended up getting us featured on The Today Show.

AJ Harbinger:

So, these are the small wins that I never charted out. Johnny never said, "Hey, I'm moving to New York and I'm going to be on The Today Show. And we're going to have a radio show." But it's about showing up to every opportunity imaginable, looking for opportunities to add value to those around us. We didn't charge the producer. We said, "Hey, you might make fun of us. We're going to show up anyways." And it worked and that's been sort of the running theme through all of our lives. Blue collar background, raised with, "Outwork everyone, and the success you're looking for will come." You don't get there to 900 episodes if you aren't willing to put in some blood, sweat, and tears along the way. And that opportunity opened major doors. Allowed us to relocate to Los Angeles, keep the show, get introduced to other hosts on Sirius XM. And of course, bring on some amazing guests to our podcast as well.

Johnny Dzubak:

Well, I want to add to that. With all the technology that was being created in front of us, I mean, when we moved to New York, it was still MySpace. Facebook was just figuring out its thing. And I believe when we got to New York,

AJ Harbinger:

It was college only then.

Johnny Dzubak:

It was college only. Because I remember only hearing about it and not being able to go on it. Twitter was just getting started. I remember when we were all fumbling around with it about like, "How was this even used? This thing seems stupid." But with all of that, it gave us an opportunity to make a lot of noise. And we used all of it, including the subway systems in New York to make a lot of noise and I'll explain. For us, it was, and the plan was, "Get to New York and make as much noise as possible."

Johnny Dzubak:

"Any publicity is good publicity." We're going old school. "Use every tool at your disposal and go full on," because we didn't have a crystal ball to see what this was going to turn into. We only had the energy and the excitement for doing something new using all this new technology. So we stacks of flyers, going to Central Park, going to Union Square, throwing flyers all over the subways for the radio show, for the podcast. I mean, and we had people reaching out to us because they wanted to know who were these guys making all this noise. And you can imagine New York City, it is a big city, but we were able to get our signal to get through all the other noise because of how loud, how persistent and you could say how arrogant and ignorant we were about the whole thing, because we're like, "Listen, nothing else matters except being loud, getting our message out there."

Johnny Dzubak:

Because it was all brand new. There was no road, there was no path. We had to forge our own. And that whole idea of publicity at any cost, right, that comes straight from the music business, right? All publicity is good publicity. It doesn't matter. As long as they're talking about you, you're on their mind. And we used that to the best of our abilities and everything that we were able to create in New York was through that method so much so that even when we moved to LA to have a new beginning, we had to keep coming back because of our fan base in New York. And we had to come back a few times before we fully were there in LA and set up.

AJ Harbinger:

And there is bad publicity too, but funny. So, The Today Show invites us on and they come in to see all the training that we're doing with our clients and who we're working with. And sure enough, some SNL writers are watching The Today Show saying, "Who are these clowns who think they own New York City?" So two weeks later, we're watching Saturday Night Live, like the rest of America, and the weekend update comes on and they're making fun of The Art of Charm, "Charm school in New York City. Learn how to get better with women at the local YMCA with these losers." And my dad called me and he's like, "Were you just made fun of on Saturday Night Live?" So all noise, no matter what, we were seeking it. And that splash really helped launch the business.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow. Okay. So I got to ask you, you've been at this over a decade, 12 years or so. You've coached thousands of leaders,

Johnny Dzubak:

15 now.

Carey Nieuwhof:

on The Art of Charm. What's that? 15,000, 15 years. Yeah. And so the question is what are the recurring issues? Because this is a leadership podcast. So I'm always interested in the success path of people and it's always less linear than you think. But a lot of leaders struggle with confidence. Maybe they're married, maybe they've got dates, but like they're struggling with confidence, they're struggling with communication. What are some of the recurring issues that keep coming up with your clients? And then what is some advice that you usually end up dispensing?

AJ Harbinger:

Yeah, we focus on the three C's, communication, connection, and confidence, and they're all intertwined. So we will find that many of our clients will come to us saying, "Hey, I'm lacking in confidence," and not realizing the impact that's having on their existing relationships with their spouse, with their friends, with their coworkers, and their inability to communicate their message to influence, persuade, to get people on board. And that for us was a real aha moment. The first signal that we were lacking in that area, for me in particular, was clearly shown in my dating life or lack thereof. And for many of us, that is the first feedback loop that is closed. You go on a, what you think is a great date. You put your best foot forward and they don't want to hang out with you again. And you're like, "Something's not working." Some of us may find that in our career, you put your best foot forward.

AJ Harbinger:

You try to get in that leadership role and you're passed over. And for many of our clients who are top performers, meaning they've read all the books, they've listened to all the podcasts, they're constant learners. They also set such high standards for themselves that they can't help but feel like imposters. And I felt that in graduate school and that trickled into all aspects of my life.

AJ Harbinger:

So we start with what's going on between your ears. And we found that just having our guests come on the show and talk about their own struggles with mindset and allow people to see that it's more common than you think, you're not alone. This is not unique to you. And there are strategies that you can put into place to have a better conversation with yourself. When you start having a better conversation with yourself, accepting who you are, flaws and all, making commitments of the mission that you're on and if fear gets in the way, fear is not going to stop you. You can accomplish pretty much anything. And that's why when it comes to the science, we are so tightly bound to acceptance commitment therapy. We view it as one of the best strategies that anyone can implement, not just those who are suffering with depression or anxiety, but anyone can implement in their lives to get more out of it, to reach their potential. So all of our clients-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Can you explain acceptance commitment therapy? It's not something I'm familiar with. Yeah.

AJ Harbinger:

So it came out of a branch of cognitive behavioral therapy. And essentially, what many of us are feeling is fear, an inner critic, an inner dialogue or conversation that's happening that says, "You're not enough. You're not worthy. You shouldn't. You can't." And if that voice gets too loud, it takes over the driver's seat in your life. And it steers the car off the road. What acceptance commitment therapy shows is number one, accepting that voice is a part of you. It's not going away, but it can be managed. And one of the strategies to do that is a concept called diffusion. So it's not allowing your emotions to define you. And meditation is a great practice for you to start working through some diffusion techniques, but understanding that many of us label our emotions good or bad, and then they become our identity.

AJ Harbinger:

And then everything else that happens in our life is a cause of that. If we can accept ourselves for who we are, and we can make a commitment to a personal mission, to our core values, to a purpose driven life, we can act in the face of fear. We can find that courage to go after anything that we want in life. And we find with our clients that that inner critic gets so loud that they can't speak up in a leadership role. They can't ask that person out that they're interested in. They can't fulfill their dreams or their real potential. And we start focusing on the mindset piece first and giving you practical tools and strategies on the communication and connection front "to get out of your own way" as Johnny likes to say.

AJ Harbinger:

We wouldn't be on this planet for as long as we have if nature was really working against us. We tend to work against nature. We are wired to connect with one another. Our survival depends on it. We are wired for relationships. So if you are struggling in these areas in large part, you're getting in your own way. So the best way to start to get out of your way, to start to take action is through acceptance commitment therapy principles that we use in our coaching programs and simple executable strategies to have better conversations, like our conversation formula, or signals to recognize when someone's

actually trying to connect with you, or what we call emotional bids. So a very practical example is our conversation formula. Carey, you're very adept at it because you interview lots of great leaders. Many of us who have had practice in this area, well, this comes naturally to us.

AJ Harbinger:

But if you ever find yourself in a situation where you're shy, you don't know what to say. Maybe you're feeling a little awkward. We have a simple conversation formula that'll break you out of that rut, that will allow you to talk to anyone and connect in a real meaningful way. The conversation formula says, "If you take interest in someone else, they will be more interested in you naturally." Which is why just coming in, talking about yourself, pitching your ideas with no context doesn't work. You have to get the other person interested. The way we do that is we ask really great questions of the other person. We come from a place of curiosity. Then we actually have to value their answers, which is step two in the conversation formula. What they're saying is incredibly important to them. So we have to listen with our eyes, and our ears, and our heart and be open to what they're sharing. And then we have to work to relate to them.

AJ Harbinger:

And we do that in the form of a statement. So where many of our young leaders get tripped up is they go, "Great, I just got to ask a lot of questions. I just got to keep asking questions." And they end up in a situation where, "Well, there's no more to talk about because I can't ask you any more questions." And the other person feels like, "Well, I've been put on the spot. I've been interrogated. And now I don't know anything about you, AJ. You haven't shared anything with me."

AJ Harbinger:

So that's an example of a simple framework that we use in conversation to help people on the communication front. When it comes to connection, it's understanding that that inner critic, that dialogue that's going on in your head takes you out of the moment from being present, from being enthusiastic, from actually hearing those emotional bids that the other person is sharing to connect with you. Once you start to recognize that these bids are happening all around you and understand what emotional bids are, you can use them to your advantage to connect with anyone, not just people who have same interests, or passions, or pursuits. And we're fortunate that we get to bring these tools into every single podcast episode we record. And our audience gets to see and hear us at work, using the exact principles that we teach inside of our coaching program.

Johnny Dzubak:

What I enjoy about all of this is that these are not new ideas. What AJ and I are now bringing in is the most refined of those ideas. So for instance, with cognitive behavioral therapy, you have people like Aaron Beck, who is like the grandfather of that, of modern CBT or Steven Hayes who's the modern father of ACT, acceptance commitment therapy. But we're also, these are ideas that William James had brought in and you could trace these ideas back to the Stoics. I mean, this is having an emotional response, right? And then overcoming it, detaching from it, being objective, seeing what's going on there and then asking yourself, "Do I want to act accordingly to what these emotions are doing?" Your emotional response. And so what we get to see is the evolution of philosophy, these ideas getting refined and stacked on top of each other. And what you are getting when you listen to The Art of Charm or you come to our programs is you're getting the very up to date, refined best stuff out of this that it's not just grabbed from a tree.

Johnny Dzubak:

AJ and I have been using it. It has been tested through ourselves and in our programs. And we like the call being in front of the room when we're going through our programs and we're testing out new ideas, this is a laboratory. And what we're looking for is the light bulb, and the smiles, and the eyes getting wide when these ideas are finally hitting home. How many ideas Carey, have you read over and over again and they never did anything until one day you hear an example or an experience finally allows you to connect to that idea to where it changes your life?

Johnny Dzubak:

Well, these are the points that we're looking for in our programs. Is this idea finally hitting with our year long coaching program? Some of the ideas that these young men are exposed to that first day, that first week, that first month they're like, "Oh, that seems fun. I should try that." But then life happens. They move on, they forget about it. And then for whatever reason, they have an experience and that subject gets brought back up on the next call and all of a sudden the pathways open up. They are now connected to that idea and they're fully engaged. And that idea now is one that empowers them. So they look for more opportunity to make sure that it's implemented and becomes habitual in their life.

Carey Nieuwhof:

One of the working theories I have and feel free to disagree completely because you guys are in this way more than I am. But if you've been at this for 14 years, there is an argument that can be made among some and I would subscribe to this, that conversation is harder now than it was 14 years ago because of the digital age. Some of the research with Gen Z would show in life real conversations, like even how to navigate a phone call, nobody does phone calls anymore. Real life conversations are getting harder. Have you seen that? Like, would you agree with that? Or do you think that's a myth?

Johnny Dzubak:

100%.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And if so,

AJ Harbinger:

1000%.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What are you doing about it? Oh yeah, you would agree.

AJ Harbinger:

And that's the trendline that we're following. And that's part of the reason why we have been wildly successful because this is not taught in schools sadly. We are thrown into group situations and we are expected to learn how to communicate, to learn how collaborate, to learn how to be cooperative and some of us do. But what happens to everyone else who doesn't, who is suffering with a little social anxiety, who is a little shy, who is introverted? There's no classic way for you to just say, "Okay, I'm going to sign up for communication 101 in college and okay, conversations for here on out are simple and easy for me."

AJ Harbinger:

But these are the frameworks that we try to bring to our clients to not only impact their confidence level, but we know, the science shows, the happiness study from Harvard shows the more connected we are as humans, the happier and healthier we are on this planet, period point blank. And the saddest part is the data is literally showing what you're saying. We now have less people on average to call as close friends than we did just 10 years ago. And there are people in Gen Z who have a zero for close friends. They have no one that they could tell their deepest, darkest secrets to, that they could be vulnerable to, that they can share their weakness and overcome it and they feel alone. And that's why we're seeing an epidemic in depression and suicide and everything else. And you look at what recently came out from Facebook and the impact that social media is having on young women and their body image issues.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

AJ Harbinger:

We are wiring ourselves to see everyone else as having things we don't have, all the gifts, all the pleasures that life has to offer. And I was talking to Amy, my fiance, we want to have a family. And we're talking about what it's like to raise kids in this system, in this situation with this technology. And growing up for me yeah, there were attractive kids in school. There were kids who had it all, but they were the 0.01%. It'd be like one or two or a handful. But I go on the apps now and all I see is millions of people like that. And I start to feel bad as an adult. So I can't even imagine young minds who are tapping into these technologies and that's how they're interacting with their classmates. We had Amy's younger sister join us when she was in high school and stay with us.

AJ Harbinger:

And her and her friends were using an app called House Party. And basically they were all in their own house and this was pre pandemic. They were video chatting with the each other while they're in their own house. And I'm like, "When I grew up, I had a house party, it was called, we got on our bikes. We drove to one friend's house and we were all in person together." And we were communicating and we were learning how to connect. And we were picking up nonverbal communication signals that we know video just doesn't do an accurate representation of.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Is it too easy to just blame technology, or is that really the linchpin in all this? Johnny, what do you think?

Johnny Dzubak:

We get in trouble with this and let's be honest, AJ would not and I would not be talking to you without the technology that we're on right now and wouldn't had built our company that we utilize to become better people and to create The Art of Charm. Everybody has that opportunity. And I think much like a lot of things that empower you, you have to decide what you are going to use it for. Are you going to use it in a creative manner? Are you going to use it in an uncreative way or a destructive way? We have all the technology in the world to keep ourselves entertained 24/7. But is that going to make you happy? Is that going to allow you to create and put forth into the world and contribute to make it better?

Johnny Dzubak:

Well, no, but that consuming part of it is the first thing you think about, because we view everything for its utility. So if I show you the computer, like, "You mean I can watch movies? Great." Because that's the first thing you're looking for to quench your thirst first. But then you're like, "Well, what else does this thing do? Oh, wait, I can use it to connect with people. I can use it to make content. I can use it, but my ideas out there." Well now once you start thinking of it that way you start to think, "Well, I've been using this thing wrong. And if I've been using this thing wrong, that means I've been using it to my detriment rather than my benefit."

Johnny Dzubak:

So yes, we have all this technology and I hate to use this term, it's just a tool because if it's a tool, then it's a jack hammer rather than a hammer to hang up a picture in your living room, go for it. Right? Like, but regardless, it still empowers you and empowers you 10 times. So what are you going to use it for? We now all carry a device in our pocket that allows us, if we utilize it correctly, to change the world in front of us. That's insane.

AJ Harbinger:

Well, but here's where the scientist in me comes out because this screen is also playing on physiological processes and chemicals inside of our body that have the same impact as external poisons and chemicals. So these pathways that we are now interacting with in technology, we have never disrupted in this manner in human history. And we are just at the start of this experiment that's going on right before us. We don't know.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It is an experiment.

Johnny Dzubak:

Yes, it is.

AJ Harbinger:

We don't know.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Talk about unintended consequences, right? Like we don't know what this is doing to us.

AJ Harbinger:

As we've seen scene. We started the conversation around religion, and community, and what's going on with tribalism, and how we're afraid to say certain things in certain contexts.

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AJ Harbinger:

We are losing trust in one another as humans, and we are getting more disconnected. Technology is certainly playing a role. But what we're talking about on this planet is a complex system, and I couldn't

be a scientist and tell you it's one thing. And if we just change this one thing, but it's certainly playing a role and we've seen it time and time again in our clients. We had a fascinating talk about digital body language, and one of the things that came up is that many Millennials think it's okay to make requests over email and not do important decisions, arguing for a promotion or a raise or a change in a project in person. They'll do it in personally over email. So it is changing the way we communicate. And there are downsides to those changes that we haven't quite grappled with. And we see it in our clients. And we see it in the young leaders who are trying to rise above it, who are trying to build communities, who are trying to foster that connection that we all crave.

Johnny Dzubak:

Her name was Erica Dewan. And another fact that her research had that she had pulled out of her research was we discussed how this, we would affect our presence using this technology in Zoom meetings and all these type of things. And that's what, that's what she was looking to do. But the research has shown that we're not impacting how we're using this technology. The technology is impacting how now we go into our world, the world, it's having the direct opposite effect.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You know, it is interesting because I'm in my fifties and I have a long pre-digital memory and I also have like multiple devices everywhere I am. So, I'm not one of those laggards who will not adapt or that kind of thing. All the stuff is new. All the stuff is latest. And obviously, the company I'm running is a digital communications company, very similar to Art of Charm and in that respect. But I wonder if you fast forward 20 years, do you think will be in a place like I have been an arguer, wrote it about it in a book. Talk about it on this podcast that we have to revive the art of human conversation. Like you're saying, ask a question, right, go back and forth, make it a volley. I find a lot of people just do status dumps when you meet them.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's amazing. My wife and I will go to an event you and nobody asks us a single question. Everybody just gives us updates on their own life. And it's like, "Ooh, I miss real conversation." Now we have some good friends that we have great conversations with, but, and I do this podcast. We have great conversations, but do you think that will become just the way your great grandparents did it, 30 years from now? And that we'll be in a place where people have lost the ability to connect and communicate with each other? Or do you think this is such an urgent thing? We have to recapture it. I'm just curious what I haven't asked anyone that question before. So here's the way I just wonder what you think.

Johnny Dzubak:

Here's the way I see it is. And it's just looking at the trends that have already happened. For a lot of people who come through The Art of Charm, one of the first things that they realize after they build up all these skills and they can't wait to go out and use them. And so, they're armed to the teeth with conversational ideas and concepts that'll change their world and give them insight into other people that they've never had the opportunity to see before. So they're really excited, but they have put time to practice and learn all these things. They've come to The Art of Charm. They're on another level. Most other people haven't taken that interest, therefore they haven't implemented these concepts. They don't know about them. They're only dealing with their emotions and what their emotions are telling them to do.

Johnny Dzubak:

For instance, my dad is one of those people. If he's out in the yard and you walk past, my dad is going to leave straw what he's doing and he is going to wave at you. And he is going to come down and talk to you. That's just how my dad is. He talks to everybody.

AJ Harbinger:

I can attest.

Johnny Dzubak:

And-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Hey AJ is a witness.

Johnny Dzubak:

He's very extroverted. So my dad comes to visit me in Los Angeles and we're on Runyon Canyon, which very famous canyon, urban hike that everyone does in Los Angeles. And of course my dad is trying to talk to everybody that passes us on that hill. He's waving, "Hey, how are you doing? Yeah, what's going on? Oh, it's really hot out today." He's not getting any reactions back from anybody. A lot of people have their headphones on, other people are just in their own head.

Johnny Dzubak:

And he turns to me, he's like, "Well, these people don't like to talk out here." And I'm like, "Well, it's not that, dad, right now. You know, people are now conditioned not to speak or to be in their head or to be looking at their advices or wondering what the conversation or what they're going to be posting later." And what is interesting about this, and this is why I love what we do, when you come through, you're getting a leg up. You're going to be the person who is able to stick out at that networking event because you're not just running around, giving people updates. You are being interesting by being interested. And you're going to understand the questions and the conversation formula that opens up amazing opportunities that you did not, could not even imagine were in front of you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

AJ, what's your take on that? I'd love your take.

AJ Harbinger:

Yeah. I think we are reaching a tipping point. I think many are starting to see the impact this is having. There was a very popular movie around the impact that social media is having. And I think much like anything, it takes a backlash. It takes people realizing the damage for us to put things into perspective. We no longer let our kids play video games 20 hours a day. We know that we need to get them outside and we need to buy them a bicycle. And we need to get the light, went, playing sports and interacting with one another.

AJ Harbinger:

Right? So yes, technology will always have a place. I think we're coming to terms with how much we are going to depend on it. And with that, I think we are going to see, as automation continues to rule the day, that the ability to communicate is to become a very high price commodity. It's going to be a sought after skill because humans aren't going anywhere. We're always going to be interfacing with machines. Your ability to influence the humans who are interfacing with machines is going to become the most sought after skillset, and communication is going to be a part of how we stay connected as humans.

Johnny Dzubak:

An interesting point....

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, that was my next question. Yeah, go ahead, Johnny.

Johnny Dzubak:

There used to be a commercial in the early 90s that I remember seeing when I watched television, and the commercial was a bunch of young people who were interviewing for a job and all of them would say, "I'm a people person. I'm a people person. I'm a people person." "What makes you so special?" "I'm a people person." And the commercial was about like DeVry Institute or something like that where it's like, "Well, you may be a people person, but you don't have any hard skills." Right? Well, now all we're hearing about is, "I got people who read all the books who know all the knowledge you can cut, but the thought of having a beer with this guy after work..."

AJ Harbinger:

Or being stuck in a layover.

Johnny Dzubak:

Makes me cringe.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. Six hour layover. It's like, "No, no, no." Yeah. Okay, because you went where I was thinking, because you remind me of what Nir Eyal and Cal Newport have said, and both have been guests on this podcast. I know, you know those guys, but they're saying the ability to focus, the ability to do deep work is a super power because everybody's skimming. Nobody can think anymore. And I would agree with you. I think the ability to converse, the ability to actually have an interest in other human beings become a super power in the future. And that it is a skill. An art.

AJ Harbinger:

You said this data, Carey, and you hit the nail on the head earlier. 99% of podcasts don't get listened to, 1% do. And that's because the 1% leading those podcasts are excellent communicators and have compelling conversations with their guests. I know one of your questions is how do we prepare for our show? Communication is the key to that. Like if you want to succeed in the creating space to cut above the noise, you have to be a powerful communicator. You can't build a business. If you look at all these unicorns that are coming about, they have leaders who are powerful communicators to get everyone else to buy in.

AJ Harbinger:

Whether you want to call it drinking the Kool-Aid or you want to call it being kids for the culture. They're, marshaling the resources to build these tremendous companies, to create the momentum for disruption and change by the power of their words, not by the power of their computer code. We do not have robots running unicorns. We have humans, and humans are marshaling the machine and the AI to their advantage. But again, you look at all of these leaders that we look up to. It is their communication that allows them to succeed. And I don't see that going away.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, no. And on that note, yeah, we did have a lot of pre-roll before we started recording again, I've also been on your show. We'll link to that in the show notes, which I'm really grateful for, but you're right. There is a stat that my team dug up that 99% of the downloads on podcasts today happen for 1% of the shows. So both of us lead shows that are fortunate to be part of that 1%. But you know, you think about that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

There's 2 million podcasts out there and the vast mid have under 300 downloads. And sometimes that's because the creators abandon them, but there are people who every week are trying to get that. And to that end, let's go to that question. We made it to question one, Johnny, which I said is often the sign of a good podcast interview. When you're at question one and you're 40, 51 minutes into the conversation, that is a sign of a good conversation. But let's go to question two, I think, or three, you've interviewed some amazing guests in person. You had Kobe Bryant in studio before his very tragic and untimely death. David Goggins, Tim Ferriss, and so many others. So how do you prepare for that interview, and how do you draw out the best in your guests?

AJ Harbinger:

Well, I think first and foremost is to realize that with that 2 million podcasts, no one wants to hear the same conversation twice. And we are not a show where you're going to get the softball questions, the backstory. There are other shows and hosts that do a much better job of that. So number one, we play to our strengths. We don't try to acquiesce to everyone. We don't claim that we're going to be the best talk show hosts in the world. We come into the show looking to learn, and we know that we're learning how to become better leaders, better communicators, build deeper relationships. So we do our best to keep the show focused on those topics, because they're our strengths. And we have the science and the experience to back it up, which makes for great conversation. So we're not going to ask Kobe Bryant, "Can you tell us for the 50th time what happened in the 1997 playoff game, time out with Phil Jackson?"

AJ Harbinger:

There's been documentaries about it, right? We're not going to do that, but I'm going to ask Kobe, how on earth did you decide that children's books were going to be your next passion and how do you switch gears from being successful in one area to starting all over? Which I've had to do myself. And I want insight into that. So it comes from that place of deep curiosity, number one. And with that deep curiosity means a lot of preparation and research. Actually reading the book and listening to other shows and being like, "Oh, well, when he was on Lewis Howes' show, he made this one comment. It was kind of offhand and Lewis took the conversation a different direction. How can I take that comment and go a little deeper and see what he was actually saying or meaning by that one response?" That's what we do.

AJ Harbinger:

And then Johnny and I have our own research methods and then we have a pre-meeting and we sit down and go, "These were the questions and directions I was thinking." "Okay, these are the questions and directions I was thinking. Alright, well, it sounds like you want to take into this direction. Why don't we spend some time there?" "Okay, AJ, you're thinking this, let's spend some time here." And then, sometimes much like this show, all the preparation in the world and you get in a great conversation and a rhythm with the guest and all of a sudden you forgot that you've hit record, and you're 45 minutes into the episode. And that definitely happened with David Goggins. He was doing rounds for his book. We knew we had read the book. We knew that he was going to get a ton of the same questions that he had basically been asked on the Joe Rogan episode.

AJ Harbinger:

And we didn't know that he was this shy, introverted guy until we caught him saying that on another podcast. So we met him down in the parking lot, knowing that he was going to be a little shy, not his David Goggins personality that you see when the cameras are rolling. And on the elevator ride up to the studio, we shared our own stories of overcoming being introverted and not liking to do all the press in the media. And in that elevator ride, it clicked, "Okay, I'm coming into a studio space, that's safe and comfortable, and these guys want the best for me." And he let us guard down and we had a tremendous conversation. So we're looking for those moments too, where we can be a little bit more human before record so that the guest feels more comfortable to let their hair down as well. And that's why we don't necessarily like to follow a cookie cutter, "These are the three questions we ask every guest."

AJ Harbinger:

We only have one question at the end, because we're trying to inspire all of our listeners to find and unlock their own X factor. What makes them extraordinary, because we all have it. And the more that you can hear it from our guests, the more it might help you uncover it yourself.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well and not all the publisher questions they send you in advance, right? From the publisher about the book. Johnny, any thoughts on preparing and hosting great conversations?

Johnny Dzubak:

Well two things when our producer, he knows that if the book is a physical book, that's what I want. I don't want the Kindle. I don't want the PDF. I want to be able to turn my computer off and just focus on the book. As you were mentioning, focus is a superpower, and I understand that. And I can't fully immerse myself if I'm thinking about other things. I want the physical book. I'm going old school. I'm going down by the pool. I'm going to sit outside. I'm going to read. And, and there's not going to be no phones. Sometimes I'll have my phone with me just to throw my notes in as I'm getting through it. But that's important to me because that allows me to fully surround myself with the concepts and ideas, so I can have some fun with it cause that's important.

Johnny Dzubak:

And the other part of it is I remember when it wasn't easy to get guests. And I remember writing emails and calling publicists to talk about this podcast we had, "And we would love for you to throw people on

who are looking to promote stuff. Maybe it's a movie. Maybe it's a television show. Maybe it's another." And they said, "Well, it's a podcast. Get out of here, kid, quit, quit bothering us."

Johnny Dzubak:

I mean, we were back, this podcast has been going before Joe. And, and so remember what, how difficult it was to not only get guests, but you had to explain what it was.

Johnny Dzubak:

And how it would-

Carey Nieuwhof:

And selecting listen.

Johnny Dzubak:

And how it would help them to give you an hour of their time. But now yeah, you're part of the you're on a list and the list is the tops number of podcasts. And this is the circuit. And when that book comes out, you're going to go on all these podcasts. Which means that by the time you get David Goggins, or by the time you get Kobe Bryant, or by the time you get Steven Hayes or Adam Grant, or any of these, Carey, yourself, these people who have been wonderful to give us our time and make our show as great as it can be, you've already made the rounds. You've already been on some shows. So it is important to us, and our goal to, as AJ mentioned, not to give a cookie cutter interview. To get something special out of that, that makes our show and our conversation unique.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So I think this is relevant, because we have a lot of content creators, and even if they don't have podcasts. If you think about a preacher, they often do interviews and there's nothing worse than the interview with the stock answer. So I have a little arsenal, a toolkit of, "If I sense I'm getting the, 'this is interview number eight today. And when are we done?'" Which doesn't happen a whole lot. But when it does, or I'm getting stock answers I've heard before, I have a couple of tricks that will throw people off the scent. I would love to know if you guys have tricks that get people out of that automaton mode.

AJ Harbinger:

The first trick is actually taking a concept from their book, applying it, and then sharing the result you had. So perfect example. We had a guest on recently.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You did that with me.

AJ Harbinger:

See, you could speak to it. So that throws the guest for a loop, because they are on auto pilot. They are not expecting many of podcast hosts who have even read the book, let alone thumb through it, let alone taking a look at it. And I can't show you if I were to pan the video, you would see piles of books with post-it notes and earmarked pages and things highlighted so that I can tease those moments out. And I am directly applying these concepts into my own personal life. So if I feel like the conversation is going in that direction, like we're getting very generic things, then I will refer to a strategy, a technique, or a

concept that I found in the book fascinating enough to apply in my life, to try out, to see how it would work.

AJ Harbinger:

And I dig a little deeper there, and that tends to surface the gold. And then what ends up happening out of the end of it, you know, as Johnny was saying, we used to be pitching like crazy to get people on the show. It was a full-time job just sending out, "Will you come on our show?" Now we can end a great conversation with, "Hey, this was so much fun. Who else do you know that would be a great fit for our show?" And if you change that guest's perspective and allow them to feel like you really cared and you put everything you could into that episode, they're going to love to send their friends your way because they know it's going to be great for them as well. And here I'll date you for a little bit of how long we've been doing this.

AJ Harbinger:

So I'll never forget slash.org. I don't know how many in your audience know about it. This is the nerd in me. In 2006, they had a podcast article about a new Linux application that was making podcasting easier to capture audio. That was the genesis of us deciding to buy the equipment and hit record. So, we were one of the first movers in this space and never in a million years, thought it would get to this, not to say that this was the expectation or the dream. It was a fun hobby, and a way to record some, what we thought were fun and entertaining conversations in the beginning. We realized that we really only had about six hours of our own conversation to go on and we should probably find some guests. And then we started hitting up everyone we could possibly find to come on and share their story with us.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Fascinating. Johnny, any tricks in your toolbox to open up a guest to really talk?

Johnny Dzubak:

AJ nailed it. I mean for me, when we, you would be surprised how many people finish our conversation and they go, "I can't believe you read my book. Thank you so much." And we're like, "I mean, you're on the show because we want to learn about this. I mean, this was what makes us great." And we could not do the show at the level that we do it if we didn't love self development.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, you guys threw me because you started, we went right into the conversation and you started by saying, "In the last 18 months, we really went through some burnout ourselves." And you had been playing with your green, yellow, and red zones, which I talk about in *At Your Best*. You, Johnny's, green zone is here. But AJ, you're more like this. And I'm like, "Oh wow. You guys, like, you're in." And at that point that made it a way more interesting interview for myself. And, it was, it was, it was really good. One of my tricks, by the way, I'll just share this. If people are curious, go ahead, Johnny, and then I'll share the trick.

Johnny Dzubak:

Well just, that's one of the things. That's the pros and cons of everything that's going on here right now is the bar to entry is so low. You can get a podcast going, you can talk about whatever you want. You could be, and it's about being the authority figure and how to do that and all of these things. And that's

the pro, anyone can do it, so get at it. But that's also the con, because you do meet a lot of people who are just going through the motions, because the idea of it being a podcast host in a coaching company, "Oh, it's a great idea." But if you were going to be successful at it, it takes a dedication and a love for that very thing.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. And there is a lot of work in it if you want to do it well. And you know, to get to the results, there's a lot of heartbreak. So for the record, one of the things I do, if I sense I'm getting an answer that's been given many times is, I'll ask an emotional question.

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Carey Nieuwhof:

And I'll ask something like, it could be simple, like, "How did that make you feel?" Or, here's another question I'll sometimes throw in, "Well, what frustrates you? What frustrates you about podcasting? What frustrates you about the way people communicate today?" Or, "What frustrates you?" And when you ask an emotional question, you get an emotional response. And that's where people are like, "Oh, well, I'll tell you what frustrates me. What drives me nuts is when you text somebody and they don't text you back and they're ghosting you and then na na na." And all of a sudden I'm like, "Okay, I gotcha, you're off script, and now we can go to magical places."

AJ Harbinger:

So you want to have better conversations? Ask, "What are you excited about?" So in your audience right now, you will evoke that emotion in their response, and they will link that feeling to you, and people remember how you made them feel. "They don't remember what you said, they don't remember what you do," famous Maya Angelou quote, "They remember how you made them feel." And I love that question, "What are you excited about?" Especially coming out of this pandemic and coming out of the tough year that we've all had, you get people talking about what they're excited about, you make a great first impression, you have an amazing conversation, and they remember you.

Johnny Dzubak:

I want to back up what AJ just said about that Maya Angelou quote, and this is important. And we see this all the time, that the emotion that people are feeling due to what somebody says to them invokes an action. And you see this on, say, social media. Well, let's take Twitter, for instance. Somebody puts out an idea, you don't like it. It makes you mad. So then you get all worked up, and you post a reply, and, "Look at this, I can't believe he said this." And we now are playing telephone tree where the person who put out the ideas is like, "I didn't say that at all." So they did remember what they said. Those emotions were so strong that they worked up a whole idea of what was said and what they meant, and what this was contributed to. And they're like, "Eh, oh, I just was talking about mashed potatoes." What is going on here?

Carey Nieuwhof:

So what is exciting, you guys, coming out of the pandemic? Or through, whatever you want to call it.

AJ Harbinger:

Well, so a huge pivot for us was this idea that we had to be in the room to change lives. Because much of what we know about communication and connection is in real life. And we firmly believe that that's the most important communication we had. And the pandemic forced us to move our coaching programs in a more virtual way. And we've been really excited about the results that our clients are having in their lives, even though we haven't been able to get in a room with them yet.

AJ Harbinger:

The goal is to still get back there, to create that community. But going into the pandemic, if you would've told me that we would be coaching virtually and seeing these tremendous results in our clients, I would've told you that you were full of BS. And that's exciting to me, because that allows the company to scale and to have an even larger impact. Working in a room with over 9,000 clients, companies, corporations, military special operators is tremendous. But it's only me and Johnny who are doing it. So outside of cloning us, which I would love the scientific community to get ahead on, it's tough to scale a business like that. So that's really exciting to us, that we could touch more lives and of course have a better impact than just a podcast, to really interact and coach clients.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, and what you told me, I think when we were recording for your show, is that something like 85% of your business model disappeared overnight, when the world shut down. That's pretty staggering, man. So do you find all of it translates to virtual, or some of it? Because this is a very live issue in the lives of a lot of people listening to this podcast, trying to figure out that hybrid, digital, real life space. What works online, what works in real life? What's your take on that?

Johnny Dzubak:

You have to reconfigure how you're looking at, what we did pre-pandemic worked very well for what it was for that model. Being in the room, the guys, everyone stayed with us. We had a huge house in Los Angeles. And we had to look at that model and do our own research of, what were the impactful moments? Are they able to be duplicated? Are we able to do those online? And if not, can we reconfigure that? Or, do we have that as a component that is outside of our programs? So for instance, now our programs are online, and we have the X-Factor, it's a year long mentorship program. But there is also four times a year that are masterminds, where everyone does get to be in the room together, where everyone does get to meet, and work on things and dig in a bit deeper. Which gives us an opportunity for people to learn concepts, implement them in their own lives, and then see where their troubles were.

Johnny Dzubak:

Whereas, when we were doing this on a full week, it was a five day program, it was, "You come in, you're going to drink information with a fire hose, and then you're out." And it was so condensed and so intense, that it rattled a lot of people's cages. It wasn't for the faint of heart. And there was lots of pros to that. But as you can imagine, lots of cons with that as well. So I think now that we have reconfigured everything, we've worked with some wonderful people to get the program where it is, and we're well over a year into it, and the results have been through the roof. Now that we're able to take our time and use this technology, I think our programs are that much better than ever. And we would have never found that out without it.

AJ Harbinger:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, I want to ask you a question that's a bit of a curve ball. But you have a lot of church leaders listening. Johnny, you and I were talking a little bit before we started recording. You grew up with a Roman Catholic background. AJ, I don't know what your background is, whether you had any exposure to Roman Catholic background.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But so you have some Roman Catholic leaders listening, a lot of Protestant leaders listening. And the church isn't about being charming, but based on what you know about communication and how to connect with people, what advice would you give to church leaders? If you were trying to change our approach or consult with us and say, "Church, here's what you could do." Adam Grant and I had a fascinating conversation a few months ago about sort of the approach. And I always say to my team, when we hire new staff, fresh eyes are the best eyes. So I love your perspective, as people who are not necessarily involved deeply in the church, to give us some advice about what we could be doing differently or better.

AJ Harbinger:

I think for us, we like to say that we're Dale Carnegie for the modern world. And we've all read *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. And a phenomenal book on how to communicate and connect with humans, but as we've seen with the rise in technology, there are changes in nuances to how we communicate now versus at the turn of the century, the 19th century.

AJ Harbinger:

So for me, what I get the most out of church is when the leader has that charisma to meet me where I'm at. And I've been on the receiving end of the homily in church where I just don't feel that that church leader, that pastor, is speaking to me where I'm at. And even cares about where I'm at and is more interested in getting across the message that he's gotten across every year, the same gospel, year after year.

AJ Harbinger:

So, much like Johnny said in our coaching programs, we're constantly evolving and working to keep it fresh to meet our students and our clients where they are, and what challenges they're currently facing. And I've been on receiving end of homilies with a very charismatic leader, who can relate to each demographic within that audience, and make the message relevant and actionable to me. And I think that's a really powerful church leader, who understands their audience and their audience's needs, instead of just the same thing that's worked 10, 20, 30 years ago.

Johnny Dzubak:

And I want to say that the pond is full of more fish than ever, and those fish are lost and they're all looking for direction. And I don't think there is much in mainstream culture right now that leads people out of the dark, so to speak. And when I talk about that, maybe it's consumerism and maybe it's addiction, maybe it's just dealing with whatever else that, in the moment, without thinking about the long term aspects of it.

Johnny Dzubak:

And as an example of this is you have somebody like Jordan Peterson, who did his Bible series, and those views went through the roof, at a time where a lot of people would suggest that that's all been debunked. And that organized religion is not a ticket that you want to go down. And we could rattle off the cons, but Jordan stuck by his guns and was able to relate to all the fish that were lost, all the young men who were looking for direction.

Johnny Dzubak:

And as AJ mentioned, met them where they were, and showed them why these stories in the Bible were what they needed to hear, and related it to where they are and how they felt about the world around them, and then led them what that message is, what they can take away from that would enhance their life. And when I asked you that earlier, Carey, for when I talked to a lot of young men, I find a lot of them revisiting these ideas because they've been alienated from them. And when they did engage with them, they felt stronger. They felt they had found something that had alluded them. And this brings us to the age old philosophical question is that, is religion adaptive?

Johnny Dzubak:

And if that argument is still going on to this day, with all the technology and all the science we have, that leads me to believe that it is. And there's a lot to go about. I mean, this is why I was like, "Well, if we go through that door, we're opening a big can of worms on a whole large discussion." But to answer your question, it's a great time. And there are a lot of young people who are looking for leadership and looking for what the church can offer them. And they're not finding it anywhere else.

AJ Harbinger:

Well, I'll tell you, based in LA, one of the fastest growing churches here is Mosaic. You drive by them, Hollywood on the weekend, and it's a full party, with more young people gathering outside with instruments and interacting with one another than I ever witnessed when I was going to Catholic Church in Michigan. So there are young church leaders who are doing it, who are meeting the youth where they are, and sharing stories that resonate and get them excited about religion again. And I think we need more of that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So you guys didn't know this, but I'm doing two interviews today. They'll air very different times, but I just spent two hours with Erwin McManus, the founder of Mosaic, the lead pastor of Mosaic. And I think Erwin is a really interesting case study, because in this interview he kind of said how he's always branded as an outlier or a heretic, for his innovation. And, he said it on my podcast, he's 63 years old. And you don't have to be 25 to connect with 25 year olds. And he is a really, really fascinating person who has a ton of influence. It's funny that of all the churches you could mention, you would mention Erwin's. That's really, really fascinating. Do you guys know him?

AJ Harbinger:

No. I would love to, actually.

Johnny Dzubak:

I don't know him.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Let me know, I'll introduce you guys, that would be great. That would be fantastic.

AJ Harbinger:

But I will tell you, Johnny knows the intersection, Hollywood and LaBrea. And it's a pretty non-descript building, it's not ornate in the way that most churches are that I grew up around. But come the weekend, that intersection is just jam packed, and it's popping. A very young congregation. And when I go back home and I go to church with my family, I can count the young people on one hand. And it's sad to see. And I've sat, as I said, through homilies where the leader of the church refuses to meet the congregation where they are, and is stuck to their guns and what the message is that they choose to share.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's amazing how you mentioned at the end, Dale Carnegie's How to Win Friends and Influence People. And so, confession, I resisted the book because of its title, and its sort of iconic place in our culture, for years. But I read it when I was in my forties and I'm like, "This is a fantastic book," just on how to really engage people. And I'm so glad that you guys have developed your own approach. And I just have really enjoyed these conversations. The one on your show, the one on this one, and I hope it's the beginning of a longer conversation that we can maybe have a part two of down the road.

AJ Harbinger:

I'd love to.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's been really, really fascinating. We got to three questions, so that's good.

AJ Harbinger:

Thank you, Carey.

Johnny Dzubak:

I think we've answered a lot-

AJ Harbinger:

That's a good, good thing.

Johnny Dzubak:

...maybe all of them in some form in this conversation.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Sure. Maybe we have, but it's been great. So if they want to investigate The Art of Charm, they want to look at your coaching, they want to find out what you do, where's the easiest place for that to happen, AJ and Johnny?

AJ Harbinger:

Yeah. Well, if you're listening to a podcast, you're obviously fans of podcasts, so whatever your favorite podcast app is, The Art of Charm. We have a new episode every single Monday. If you love what Johnny and I were teaching, outside of our amazing guests and interviews like you, Carey, we drop a toolbox episode once a month, where we take a topic around communication, connection or confidence, and we go deep into the science and strategies we use with our clients and our coaching programs. If you think as a young leader that now is the time to take action and improve any of those areas, we highly recommend you check out our X-Factor Accelerator. The group is growing. It's mostly virtual, with some in person opportunities to meet and work together with us. You can find out more at unlockyourxfactor.com.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Awesome. Guys, thank you so much.

AJ Harbinger:

Thank you.

Johnny Dzubak:

Thank you, Carey.

AJ Harbinger:

It was a pleasure.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I just love how that conversation ended. And yeah, we did connect them with Erwin, so looking forward to many conversations, hopefully down the road with Johnny and AJ, and I appreciated them having me on their podcast too. So if you haven't checked out The Art of Charm, make sure you do that. And if you're a fledgling podcaster, I just want to say, hey man, I've thought about that a lot. I had a real advantage. We're just past 19 million downloads on this show. And I had a real advantage because I started in 2014, but I think podcasting is an awful lot like that old adage, "When's the best time to plant a tree? 25 years ago. When's the second best time? Today".

Carey Nieuwhof:

And it is the early days of podcasting still. I think so often it's so easy to say, "Hey, you know what? Like I think it's too late for me". It's not too late for you. So if you want to launch a podcast or you want to get into something new, well, I hope that episode was helpful to you. So we got a lot of guests coming up. If you're new to the show, please subscribe, leave a rating and review. I'm going to read out a very recent review in just a few minutes. But what I would love for you to do in the meantime is also check out the show notes. So if you want to pursue anything we talked about in the episode, go to careynieuwhof.com/episode456. Next episode, we are going to talk all things Enneagram with Beth and Jeff McCord. They are the founders of yourenneagramcoach.com. And well, we talk about a lot of things, including leadership and the Enneagram. Here's an excerpt.

Jeff McCord:

So when people are experiencing my sexiness, and they can experience it in two ways, one, it can come across as suspiciousness of a leader that, "I don't think you're taking good care of the team or the

organization." Or number two, it's because I'm fiercely loyal and I don't want there to be a mistake that's going to harm the team or the organization.

Beth McCord:

Right.

Jeff McCord:

So my engagement sometimes can bring an energy of suspiciousness, or it can bring an energy of loyalty.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And of course, if you subscribe to the podcast, you will get that automatically. And I only listen to the podcasts I subscribe to. Want to thank our partners for this episode. Thank you so much to Medi-Share, make sure you check them out at medishare.com/carey. They have a 98% customer satisfaction rating and members save 50% or more when they subscribe to Medi-Share as their healthcare solution. And by Leadr. Secure your space for the free webinar featuring myself, called The Great Resignation to the Great Resolution. It's happening November 30th, you get your free download on how to run better one-on-one meetings by heading over to leadr.com/carey, Would love to see you at that free webinar. We are going to pack it with value.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Hey, I want to give a shout out to Joshua who left us a great review. This is what Joshua had to say. His review says, "Life changing. Episode 448!" He says, "Amazing sample of the life changing content. I'm not using the term life changing as a buzzword. Literally this content has changed my paradigm on finding the healthy pace in life."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Man, I am so glad, we pray for our listeners. We really want to bring you content that does change your life. I always joke with young leaders that it took me forever to learn everything, so if I can save you a decade or so, I am happy to do that. And we also try to bring you the backstage conversations with some of the world's top leaders that well, frankly, it's just hard to get unless you have access to that kind of thing. So we are so grateful to be on this journey with you. If you would leave a rating and review, share it with a friend, let us know, give us a shout out on social. We often share when you do. I would so appreciate it. We'll catch you next time on the podcast. Thanks so much for listening and I hope our time together today has helped you thrive in life and leadership.

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 [01:29:13]