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The Art of Leadership Network.

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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 491 of the podcast. It's Carey here, and I hope our time together today helps you thrive in life and leadership. If you have been trying to figure out how to create vision for the future in this crazy time we live in where you can't even see tomorrow, well, you're going to love this episode, Brett Hagler the co-founder and CEO of New Story is back. And today's episode is brought to you by Pro MediaFire, if you're a church or a nonprofit looking to grow online apply for their growth program today by going to promediafire.com/growth, and by Generis, learn how you can accelerate generosity in your church with a free 45 minute discovery session by going to generis.com/carey.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, it's good to have Brett Hagler back on the podcast, I love young leaders and young entrepreneurs, and he is a graduate of Y Combinator, we talked about that on his first appearance on the podcast, he's also a cancer survivor, he has been recognized on Forbes 30 Under 30 list, named one of the top 100 most intriguing entrepreneurs by Goldman Sachs, and his company was named among fast companies most innovative companies in the world four different times, he is the CEO and co-founder of New Story. And while we get into it we talk about how he created a 10 year vision in a very unstable world. So many leaders I talk to say, "I don't even know what's going to happen tomorrow," which is true but what happens in a situation like that is that your vision dies.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And we also talk about how he attracts top donors, his donations have doubled, investors have doubled in the last year, and why bold ideas attract bold people. And then we talk about his habits as a young leader, he's 31 and, well, I think you're going to love this episode. So also just for fun if you follow me on social we are changing things up here, in about nine episodes we're going to hit episode 500 and I thought, well, we need some different theme music, we've used this since day one, it's been seven years, and so we're mixing things up. We're going to give people an opportunity to really vote on that and that may have happened by the time you listen to this episode but if you don't follow me on social you can do that, I'm Carey Nieuwhof on Instagram, also CNieuwhof on Twitter and Facebook and would love to connect with you there.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So question, are you an early adopter and likely to be on the cutting edge of tech? Well, if so Pro MediaFire is working on new technology for churches and nonprofits that's never been done before for mission based organizations so they can grow online. If you're looking to reach people online and you want to be involved in a new cutting edge solution at a reasonable price here are the requirements, you're a church between 100 and 800 members or a nonprofit with 100,000 to \$800,000 in annual

revenue, got that, 1 to 800 members people and a 1 to \$800,000 budget, you have the budget to spend 100 to \$200 a month to grow online and you or a team member are willing to commit to a one hour monthly meeting for growth.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So if that's you Pro MediaFire is currently accepting applications for their growth program, this team will interview applications and work with the select group. So if you want to apply go to promediafire.com/growth and sign up today, that's promediafire.com/growth. Also, I sat down for a moment with Jim Sheppard the principal at Generis and I asked him this question, I said, "What significant problem have you seen with leaders and how they handle the offering moment in church?" Every day, every Sunday I should say, church leaders get up and they ask for an offering, well, what mistakes do they make? Here's what Jim said.

Jim Sheppard:

Yeah. I think by far Carey the number one thing I see and it's on auto play they're doing the same thing almost without thinking about it on a weekly basis. And that's where the problem is, you're always saying the same thing, it doesn't land anywhere, it doesn't get you anywhere. I think the fix is really easy, just be very focused, be very intentional. Everything else in your weekly flow is very strategic, very intentional, very mapped out, do the same with your giving moment.

Jim Sheppard:

I would have what I call a 32, 12 and 4 rhythm every year, have a calendar for your 52 weeks of the year and make sure that you follow that so that you know what you're doing. 32 times a year talk about the scriptural backdrop forgiving, 12 times a year minimum once a month talk about the impact, show videos, the impact of what happens when you give here, four times a year have someone from your board or your finance team talk about why you can trust us when you give here, trust is one of the underlying elements and I would do that. So the 32, 12 and 4, there's four open ones there that you can do anything else you want to with them but that's what I would do, just be very focused, be very intentional with it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So our friends at Generis have partnered with hundreds of churches to normalize the giving conversation and help them weave generosity in the fabric of their culture. If you want to learn how you can accelerate generosity in your church with a free 45 minute discovery session simply go to generis.com/carey, that's G-E-N-E-R-I-S.com/carey. Well, you're in for a good one today, here is my conversation with Brett Hagler. Well, Brett welcome back, it's great to have you.

Brett Hagler:

Carey, thanks for having me back on, I love the show and I'm excited to talk with you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow, I'm excited to catch up too. And on that note give us an update on what's been happening with New Story and 3D printing houses and some of the other ventures that you've been into since we last had you on.

Brett Hagler:

Yeah. So for New Story, for those who don't know, our mission is to pioneer solutions to end global homelessness. So we work internationally with very low income families that don't have access to housing or really any kind of vice most basic human needs. And we partner with them and we try to design innovative solutions to get them into long term housing, everything from innovation around the home design which is different architecture or robotic construction such as 3D printing as you mentioned to different ways of doing financing, and we've been at it for about seven years now.

Brett Hagler:

And the last time I talked with you Carey, we're fortunate to have a good 2021 and kind of in a season of things kind of doubling, our team, our revenue, our impact is all kind of doubling so trying to learn how to best manage that. And our theme for this year is actually to get better before bigger because we don't want to grow too fast and go too crazy right now so that's the focus. And on the personal side which is what I'm most excited about, I got engaged since the last time we spoke and I feel like the luckiest guy in the world, super excited and just so giddy to get to marry the love of my life. Her name is Demi, and so that's the update on the personal side.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, that's the coolest thing, right? That's amazing. Congratulations. You set a date yet?

Brett Hagler:

Thank you my friend. Yes. Yeah. We're getting married in October of 2022 out in Montana on a ranch out there in the mountains.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That sounds beautiful.

Brett Hagler:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So from a leadership perspective doubling is pretty rare, right? How old is New Story now? How many years have you guys since you launched?

Brett Hagler:

About seven years.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So doubling can happen in the first couple of years but to have that happen around year seven is kind of unusual. What were some of the factors as far as you can tell that went into the doubling particularly when movement was restricted? You do a lot of work internationally so theoretically you couldn't travel as much as you had in the past neither could your teams, how did that happen Brett?

Brett Hagler:

Yeah. I mean, I think if I was looking at 2021 compared to 2020 things in 2020 we still had, I guess, a growth year but it wasn't aggressive growth and so we kind of withheld our head counts and tried to move a little slower in 2020. And then so last year we did save just some of our cash and our planning to press more of the gas in 2021. So from a timing perspective it was kind of learning as much as we could from 2020 and COVID and all the uncertainty, getting more clarity on our strategy, who we wanted to hire, where, how we wanted to expand and our focus. And I think by having that clarity of team and expansion and really our core strategy that enabled us to go out with conviction to get the capital we need but also to kind of have a plan in place where we could go and hire the team members that we needed to hire.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. So when you think about that though what were the factors that kind of put it into overdrive? You said, okay, your donations have double for example, right? Or your revenue, is it mostly a donor funded model?

Brett Hagler:

Yes. It's a combination of donation revenue and now some impact investment but you could just think of it simply as donation revenue. Carey, I'd say the main thing is just having more clarity and conviction on basically what we're asking for and what it can do and really just increasing the, what do you want to call it? A deal or a donation increasing the amounts. So we started getting a lot more seven figure partners in 2021 and kind of started just increasing some of the deal size or the ask size, I'd say that's probably the main thing, and then recruiting some pretty extraordinary people from other places. We put in a lot of work in 2020 and the beginning of 2021 to recruit some really great people and that investment started to pay off towards the end of last year. So those would probably be the main things.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Can we break that down a little bit more because you have a lot of nonprofit listeners listening and what I think the general consensus has been is that most people saw their giving go up in 2020 because people kind of rallied in the crisis, it sort of flat-lined a little bit in 2021, and maybe it's flattened or gone down a little bit in 2022 because if you're a church leader a lot of people haven't gone back to church. So I'm just curious as to, if you would give us the playbook or at least in retrospect, what you did that seemed to resonate with donors because doubling is significant in any economy.

Brett Hagler:

Yeah. I think in hindsight Carey which, I don't know, it wasn't really part of maybe the multi-year plan if you will, but during 2020, because of all the uncertainty happening in the world, we were totally okay with some of our projections or our numbers being lower than we had anticipated and we're kind of an extremely goal oriented organization trying to be maybe a little less of that sometimes. But we were okay with just going a little slower learning, we spent so much time just learning and kind of zooming out and getting time to think, okay, we have obviously this incredibly rare season, what do we want to do over the coming years?

Brett Hagler:

And so I think for New Story just kind of the season we were in, it had been about five years since starting the organization, we were fortunate to get off to a pretty good start in our first five years and we got to just in 2020 take some time to think what we want to do over the next couple of years. And

then we kind of put that plan together and we went out and we knew the type of people we need to hire the type of asks and deals that we need to go after and I think it was because of actually the slowdown that kind of we decided to zoom out and think about that and made a plan and went out and fortunately we were able to make progress against it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

How did you get your existing donors to double or significantly increase their giving?

Brett Hagler:

Yeah. I think it's a combination of two things, one is, I think it's easy for people to say, well, just make a bigger ask, right? Or if you're obviously on the for-profit side just go after bigger customers or go further upstream or further up the market. Yes, obviously you could do that but I feel the only way you can do that is if you have the kind of the other side of it which is the operational capacity to go out and execute against what you're asking for, right?

Brett Hagler:

So if you go in and you ask for whether it's a million dollar partnership versus a \$10,000 partnership that means that you need to be able to have a lot of the programs or the operations in a place where you can execute against that larger amount. And it's kind of building that muscle and that backend to give you the confidence and the conviction that you can go make a bigger ask because you know you have a higher confidence that you can deliver on it. And so I think we've spent a lot of time trying to build out more of that part which we can go and show people, hey, for this amount of money this is what we were able to do in this period of time because we've put in so much work to build that team out.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay. That's kind of counterintuitive because I think a lot of people would say, I've been trying to follow what you're saying, they would say, well, let's go get the money and then we'll do the thing, you're like, no, let's go do the thing and build the structure and then we'll go get the money, did I get that right?

Brett Hagler:

I mean, kind of. I mean, New Story, I mean, we've been very fortunate on our fundraising and revenue side, that's been one of our strengths. So it's not like we were coming into this kind of growth season in a place of financial issues or not being financially healthy, we were in a good place and so because of that we were able to invest into some of our team and expansion which I think then just put us in a better place to go after bigger partnerships and bigger deals.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What does an ask look like when you approach a donor and say, hey, here's an opportunity to give significantly more? What is that like?

Brett Hagler:

Yeah. I mean, we've had to learn over the years. One mantra that we say all the time is not just in asking for money or in partnerships but also just in what we decide to do as an organization is that bold ideas attract bold people. And so if we're fortunate to have relationships with influential people that have capacity and want to make a significant impact in order to attract those people to what we're doing

they're going to be much more interested in a bold concept or a bold ask is what we found, right? So if let's just say that we're sitting across the table from someone that, I'm just kind of making up numbers, right? But has capacity to give a million dollars or \$10 million, let's say \$10 million, right? And we go in and we make up this big plan for a 10 or a \$20,000 ask, right? Obviously that's a meaningful amount of money but that's a lot different than if we go in and we make an ask for two million or five million, right?

Brett Hagler:

And because from their perspective they're looking at it and saying, wow, I'm actually not getting asked this all the time in a very thoughtful way and I actually have capacity to do it. And so it's a lot more intriguing, for example, for me to go to someone and say because New Story does housing and we actually design entire communities so think of 100 to 500 home communities, right? So to make it very tangible a real example it's much more interesting to say, hey, you could fund and partner with an entire community of 300 houses, right? Which is over 1,000 people and that's the ask versus, would you consider funding five houses? That boldness is just is more intriguing. If you're speaking to whether it's a corporate partnership or a foundation or an individual that has capacity to give that boldness I think just attracts people that like those bold ideas.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I think that's such a good principle because sometimes we sit there with our very average ideas, our very incremental change, we're going to get 2% better this year, and then we're like, why aren't people buying in? Where's the vision? And how did you phrase it? Bold ideas attract bold people.

Brett Hagler:

Yeah, bold ideas attract bold people. And the other thing with that is conviction, right? Is conviction and courage to say, hey, we're going to make this larger amount ask because we are doing all the hard work on the backend to recruit great people, to build a great product, to form the right relationships and partnerships to do so and that's why we have the conviction that we can ask for this. This just recently happened, I won't say the name of the company because we haven't announced it yet, but we're extremely excited about a new partnership with a cryptocurrency company, one that everybody has heard of, one that's in crypto, and going to them they're not as interested in a smaller proposal or a pitch, right? They're interested in something much bigger that if it works it helps them prove a use case for what we're trying to do that is very exciting and intriguing to them as a company and so yeah, you have to have usually the bolder idea to make a bolder ask.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And yet you've got the mantra better before bigger, right? So there's a beautiful tension here I want to keep drilling down into because I think there's a principle here that applies across the board. Because part of that if I'm going to give you theoretically a million dollars, \$10 million, you better administer it well, that's just not like, oh, here, go put it in some interest bearing account, I want that to go to use, I don't want it to be squandered, I've got to have a confidence that that's worthy of the investment.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I mean, if you think about what Bill Gates is doing, basically he's taking his fortune and figuring out how to spend it and vetting ideas on everything from sanitation to clean energy to human health, and he's doing that with the same mind that built Microsoft, right? In other words you're going to have to prove that this works. That's a real different way of thinking for a lot of non-profit and impact organizations or

even for small businesses who are like, I can't understand why no one will fund my next phase. So better before bigger, can you drill down on either some of the principles or some of the specific things you've done to get better? I know you've hinted at it a little bit but I want to go there a bit deeper.

Brett Hagler:

Yeah. So for 2022, and we're recording this kind of in late March of 2022, we actually intentionally set a smaller number, for us it's about kind of delivering homes or communities and the number of people that we can impact. We actually intentionally set a lower number this year, it's almost flat to what it was in 2021 so that our team can go out and focus on a strategy that we are kind of all in on over the coming years and that strategy is about creating a more financially sustainable path to home ownership. So a model where the families that we get to partner with which are some of the lowest income families in the world, instead of it being a subsidy or only a kind of a charitable gift they're actually able to pay for the whole house and the land and that's packaged in, if you're listening in the US, a mortgage type of product.

Brett Hagler:

And we're trying to really pioneer what that looks like and there's a lot of learning and we want to be very deep in the weeds of getting that right, of getting the architecture right, and getting the lending right, and qualifying the right families, and the whole end to end system because we know if we get that right then that's what we believe we can really scale up this decade. And so for us it makes sense to focus on getting better before bigger in 2022 and potentially even 2023 because we have so much conviction in this approach for the decade to impact the most people.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay. So this is fascinating. Another thing, we're just going to play here for a little while, I just heard you talk about a 10 year vision and almost every leader that I'm talking to finds it impossible to find a 10 minute vision right now because everything is changing so quickly. And I've got to think, well, you've already hinted at it, that you got hit by COVID like everybody did, right? Borders shut down, the flow of goods is disrupted. So when you're building houses around the world that people can afford, and again, we'll link to everything in the show notes, if you haven't seen New Story's work it's pretty incredible, 3D printing homes and communities and it's the stuff of science fiction except it's actually happening. And I've toured your facility, I've seen a house, stood in one of those houses you built and frankly a lot of us would live in them, they're beautiful. But you've got a 10 year vision and that is something that a lot of leaders don't have, they can't even see tomorrow. How do you develop a 10 year vision in the midst of so much global uncertainty?

Brett Hagler:

Yeah. I think the uncertainty actually as I kind of briefly mentioned earlier in our session, for us it actually caused us to zoom out and to think more long term. And during COVID we actually, New Story has always worked internationally, we started in Haiti, we expanded to El Salvador, Mexico, and we're primarily from focused in Latin America, but we actually did some temporary work in the US. And that was because during COVID there was just all these issues around people being potentially removed out of their homes and our hands were tied internationally so we were like, okay, we want to do a project in the US. And we learned so much about the problems in the US and housing and the affordability issues to where we were actually considering, should we start a New Story US branch? Or should we actually do more work here?

Brett Hagler:

And this was honestly probably one of the hardest decisions that we've had to make and I've had to make and we ended up saying no. And we ended up saying, as much as we would love to, as much as our heart would say we'd love to, as much as it would be great for our financial resources and recruiting, we want to first try to be the best in the world at serving the demographic that we're working with which is a certain income base that are in certain areas and we want to try to create the best product for that market and we want to be best in the world at doing that and bringing innovation and technology and a better business orientation to that demographic. And so our mantra that year was that focus will set you free and focus will set you free was shared to us by one of our board members a gentleman by the name of Robert Hohman who started Glassdoor.

Brett Hagler:

And that's been so freeing for our team because when you're working on such a massive problem, right? Having a global housing issue is literally one of the most expensive biggest problems in the world, just by the numbers we would say aside from climate change it's the largest and most expensive problem in the world, that you get pulled in so many directions Carey, right? So many great directions that you could go and the total addressable market is so massive that you could in theory go after anything, right? Because there's need everywhere. And so what we had to do was say, what does a picture of success look like to us in 2030 and a milestone that we can set and then work backwards as to how we're going to hit it? And so that milestone for us is partnering with a million people in Latin America and a financially sustainable model and doing that will be about 220,000 homes, and that is specific to a certain demographic and there's a lot more details that go into it.

Brett Hagler:

And then anything else that comes up we have a filter to say, we may do that later on but right now we are maniacally focused on being the best in the world at delivering this product to this market for this million people and that's it. And that has been so freeing to us, I can't even tell you how freeing that's been. And then the innovation that comes we can innovate a lot but it's all within the longer term vision of getting to that million people which has constraints around it, right? And so it's not just innovating anything around the world that has to do with housing, it's innovating within the constraints that we've set and that has been very freeing for us.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's counterintuitive, Brett, but it's so much more laser focused than solving global housing issues, right? Which could easily be your mission housing every person in the world or whatever you wanted to say which sounds beautiful and looks great on a wall but it's like, how do you do it? And you made that so specific.

Brett Hagler:

Yeah. Well, we'll eventually decades from now, right? And then when I'm older and hopefully get to live a long time we do hope that we're making more of a significant dent to tens of millions of people around the world but the question we had to ask was, what is a significant milestone that we could get laser focused on this decade? And that was the million people with all those details underneath that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So you have some incredible advisors, and in your first interview here on the podcast we talked about Y Combinator, Paul Graham, that whole thing, but obviously you continue to expand your network, you continue to replenish your board, find new donors. What have been some keys to connecting with and really not just meeting someone at an event but having them partner with you when you're dealing with a high net worth or also just really valuable investors who bring an awful lot to the table or board members, advisors, partners? What are some keys to building those strong relationships that you build?

Brett Hagler:

Yeah. It's a great question Carey and it's definitely a work in progress, it's something that we're trying to always learn. I would say the things that have really worked for us is, one, going back to having that conviction and being unashamed about who we are, the way that we think, and basically the way that we roll, the way that we do things. Which means it's not going to be a fit for everybody, right? It's not going to be the way that a certain narrative that other people think you're supposed to do or they've heard it done before. And honestly, we usually don't even try to convince people, it's just if they're not on board with the style that we have and some of our core principles then there are obviously so many other amazing organizations that they could go be part of.

Brett Hagler:

And so I think what's really helped is being really clear about what we believe, about the principles that we have, about some of the, I call them narrative violations, that are different than what most people think you're supposed to do. And when you find people that resonate with that and they kind of are nodding their head and they're saying, oh yeah, I've thought that too, I've thought about that narrative violation before, that draws them in, right? And you find people that are very intrigued by what you're doing because they believe in those principles as well. And so I've always tried to be unashamed about those things and be very clear about them and knowing that that will eventually attract the right kind of people.

Carey Nieuwhof:

How do you know you're not wrong though? I mean, one of the things you get is you get feedback from people and so you're getting feedback from people who've said, yes, that's a great vision, but how do you know when you pitch to someone who's had a modicum of success in life or maybe a lot of success in life and they're like, yeah, Brett, I'm not in, I just don't see it, I don't like the way you guys are doing it? One of the things I find difficult, I think I'm asking for me, is sometimes I'm like, well, what if he's right? What if she's right? And what if I'm wrong? Where's that filter? How do you develop that?

Brett Hagler:

Yeah. That's such a good question. Oh man, it's so hard because sometimes what they're saying is very wise, is very smart. And I think that we're obviously making notes of what people are saying and sometimes if it is something that is really smart or coming at a different angle we definitely have the humility to listen and to learn. So one of our values is a humble pursuit of excellence and so while we want to definitely have conviction and pursue something we want to be humble along the way and listening and learning. And so, I don't know, I don't have a great formulaic answer for that because we struggle with that as well.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I appreciate the honesty. I don't know that I could articulate why but I get to ask the questions here so that's why I asked the question. It is one of those things because sometimes you run into someone and you tell something, you reject their advice, and then five years later you look back and go, ooh, there was some wisdom in that, right?

Brett Hagler:

Totally.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But-

Brett Hagler:

Oh, absolutely.

Carey Nieuwhof:

... you also have great investors and-

Brett Hagler:

And I felt that too.

Carey Nieuwhof:

... advisors.

Brett Hagler:

Yeah, no, I mean, look, gosh, we've made so many mistakes and we've tried so many things that absolutely have not worked. I mean, I could go back and do a retrospective on so many things that people have told me. I also think that you still need to have a conviction of where you want to go and then you have to be able to iterate along the way. And so New Story we're now seven years in as an organization and on one hand we've gone off to a good start, we've had a lot of momentum which has been such a blessing, obviously still insanely early to what we want to do. But I'd say the main thing that's happened, Carey, when I look back is just how much we've learned, right? The first seven years.

Brett Hagler:

I mean, when we started this organization we were 24 and 25 years old with my co-founders that were the same age, we didn't know really what we were doing, we had so many insecurities, we were so naive about things. And obviously I think some of that was to our advantage of just trying stuff but, gosh, did we have to learn. But I think that you have to learn by doing, that's a belief that I have, you have to learn the hard lessons sometimes by doing and I think that you're going to learn way more is if you are actually going out and trying something as opposed to researching and having 1,000 conversations of advice on what to do. So obviously it's a tough dichotomy because you want to listen, you absolutely want to have wise counsel around you and you don't want that to stifle you going out and doing and learning, so ideally it's the perfect point but it's hard.

Carey Nieuwhof:

No, there's a lot of wisdom there Brett. So I want to go back to your 10 year vision and one of the things that really got me about it was it was so specific. So why Latin America? Why that number of homes, that number of communities? Because what that is and what the question under the question is, there's a globe full of elimination in that vision and a lot of leaders are like, we're here to reach everybody, and then they end up reaching nobody, right? That whole idea, we're going to solve global poverty and then didn't quite work out. So I'd like you to walk us through just as a case study because everybody's mission is different but when I hear that 10 year vision I'm like, oh, that's exciting, that's inspiring, but it's a whole boatload. You've eliminated 99.9% of every other option to get there so can you break it down a little bit and the thinking about why that and why those parameters?

Brett Hagler:

Yes. So actually what we've done which sounds counterintuitive to an inspiring big vision is we've actually really shrunk our total addressable market, right? So we really shrunk it, and we got really specific with the region, the income level that it needs to be financially sustainable which is essentially saying that we believe families should be essentially buying the homes and we want to create the right partnerships and the right product and experience for them to do that. And then from there we figured it's about 220,000 homes which is very significant, I mean, don't get me wrong, that will make us one of the largest home builders in the country on this hemisphere so it's still a very big number but just reverse engineering.

Brett Hagler:

I just came from an offsite with our team and we started with the 10 year vision and really thinking through what needs to happen this year and next year and setting kind of a three year milestone that you don't have to get perfect, right? But it needs to be directionally accurate. And we set a number which means we would need to raise a certain amount of money, a certain amount of capital, expand our local teams in certain regions. So we're now hiring different general managers throughout places in Latin America that we've identified, and we're going very deep in those regions to build a brand, to build relationships, to build partnerships and to be able to quickly learn. And so it's broken down in a pretty detailed way so while we're on one hand pretty detailed about it we of course want to still be open handed with innovation and creativity.

Brett Hagler:

And so one example that I'll give Carey is, since the last time I spoke with you we've gained even more conviction that we really believe that even the lowest income families can want and the best way to impact the most people is to have them actually pay for their home, right? But with that there are significant challenges in doing that. Almost every family we work with is unbanked, right? So you have to think through, how do they actually make payments? Right? And how long do they payments? That whole experience and system. A lot of the existing traditional banking system or lending system is not set up for this demographic so there's a lot of challenges. But because we believe in creating that financially sustainable path that then gives us the opportunity to create, innovate, bring on other partners that can help us do that. So that's what we started talking through very recently at our offsite are different methods for doing that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I'm actually not disagreeing with you, I think a younger version of me would've said, you should give those homes away and just have people donate them, but I've learned over time that generally speaking

people don't value what they get for free. Was that kind of thinking underneath even the poor who are inhabiting these homes need to pay for them? What is under that decision? Because it's not intuitive.

Brett Hagler:

Yeah. It's a couple of things. So because New Story is seven years in we do have data on thousands of families that we've already worked with directly, right? And we have worked with some families that are literally some of the poorest families on this hemisphere and those homes have been given and we feel great about that. There's obviously so much love and compassion in doing that and so we feel great about that. And we also have started the model where families would pay for a smaller percentage of their home and that money would be repurposed and would go back into the community.

Brett Hagler:

And we actually saw that families wanted to pay, there's dignity in it, there's ownership in it of a mother being able to say, I'll never forget, she said, "My dream is to be able to tell my grandchild one day that I paid for this home and this land," Right? And so we kind of had that experience. And then the bigger picture which is now getting a little bit into the kind of strategy is we believe to actually impact the amount of people that we want to impact, tens of millions, maybe even 100 million plus one day, one, it's not just going to be New Story, we have to have of course other partners and actors do it and help them as well. But literally just there's not enough government subsidy or charity out there to do it, it's so expensive. The problem is so expensive and it's so big that it's just there's just not enough money out there.

Brett Hagler:

So we believe that the market and having it be financially sustainable in a way that you can get the home cost low enough and you can get the financing right and the terms right and bring in the right lenders and the right banks and try to create incentive within that country and within that region to lend to this demographic for housing and that families can pay it back over time and there's even a little bit of margin and profit in it that is actually how we're going to reach the most people, that's our opinion, that's what we believe. And so what we want to do with this proving out with a million people is we want to prove on a pretty large scale with a million people that this can be done, here's a model that can be replicated and it can actually be done in a way that is a financially sustainable path to home ownership.

Carey Nieuwhof:

There are so many directions I could go right now, I think I'm going to pick this one.

Brett Hagler:

Sure. Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Partnerships, you do mention part partnerships and even in the tour I did a couple of years ago of your then facility, right? You have a partnership. You're doing a lot of the work, a lot of the thinking, a lot of the design, but you have to hire engineers and the engineers are actually building the 3D printers. And I mean, a lot of people listening have a little 3D printer in their home, that kind of thing, I mean, just think

of an industrial scale, something almost the width of your house is now printing a house, I mean, these are really big partnerships, what have been some keys?

Carey Nieuwhof:

And you've got your donors and you've got your board and you've got other people on the ground, what have been some insights and mistakes you've made in building partnerships? Because you're right. And again, what I'm pushing at here, the question under the question is, a lot of us think we're going to save the world alone, I'm going to start a social media account and change global stuff or I'm going to start this not for profit or I'm going to start this and it's going to... And a lot of leaders are lone rangers and that just doesn't work at scale. So can you explain your thinking and wins and losses in the partnership department?

Brett Hagler:

Yes. And I just want to just call out the one partner you're referring to which is ICON, they're the robotic construction company out of Austin, they're absolutely phenomenal, they have been just doing such a phenomenal job the last couple of years so shout out to ICON and the team. Yeah. So the first thing that comes to mind Carey because we have tried with a lot of partners, I think the number one thing that's worked is a real commitment and a real prioritization from the top from both companies or organizations. So the ones that have really worked for us it's been a top priority for both companies. Maybe it's not the absolute number one thing for most of them that year but it is one of their top priorities for that year however long the partnership is.

Brett Hagler:

Because what that means is then you're allocating a lot of your best talent or some of your senior management to this project, it is usually some type of annual or quarterly goal for both organizations or both companies and you both have skin in the game for making it work, and there is ideally usually some type of deadline and with that creates some urgency and momentum, those are the ones that have really worked for us. The ones that haven't worked is when it's been less of a priority, there's been less urgency of a deadline or a timeline to get things done. It's kind of pushed down the organization because it's just not as important, it's maybe a nice to have, and in our opinion or our experience that creates just slowness, a lack of progress and I think with any high performing team nobody likes slowness and a lack of progress, right?

Brett Hagler:

I mean, sometimes it's okay to have a lack of, I guess, progress but if you're doing stuff, right? If you're out in the field doing something and you're trying and you're moving fast and you're focusing on it. And maybe if it's not working that's different, that's just because it could be something super hard and it's okay to fail or not have something work but just things getting dragged out and push back that's just stuff that no high performer wants. So those have been our two big learnings is getting real commitment, real prioritization, and only having a few, right? Or maybe even one or two and it's your job as a leader or as a leadership team to pick the partners that you believe can help advance your mission or your cause or your company revenue in the best way. And obviously that's a tough decision but that's what leaders have to do, they have to go out and be able to try to pick certain partners that they can go further with.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I want to talk about your personal disciplines as well because you're a young leader, you started this when you were 24 or 25, you're in your early, early 30s now, what? 31, 32, pretty young.

Brett Hagler:

32. Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

32. So you're getting married now.

Brett Hagler:

That's right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Again, congratulations.

Brett Hagler:

Thank you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Life is about to change significantly but you got to smile on your face, you look reasonably healthy from what I can see, actually quite healthy, you're not like, oh, I've been up for three days straight and living off caffeine. What have been some keys to you navigating all of this including massive growth in these first seven years as a young leader? Talk about your personal disciplines.

Brett Hagler:

Sure. I mean, this may be some of the most boring uninspiring answers that you'll ever get because I think people that know me well would say that some of the self-discipline or the habits have been a core reason for some of what's happened with New Story. And Carey it's I'm just such a believer in the daily compounding habits and sometimes it's not super inspiring and you hear it from other places. But man, when I was about 23, 24, I decided that I was going to have a few keystone habits. And I had just become a believer right out of college when I was 22 years old, actually through Buckhead Church and Andy Stanley, and I made a big 180 in my life and I wanted to prioritize healthy habits and commit to them really daily.

Brett Hagler:

And so those for me it's so simple, it's just I love working out, I've always prioritized it. Even when I was traveling 100 to 130 flights a year I would work out pretty much every day, that just helped with my mental energy, it impacted my mind, obviously it impacted physically as well, but that was something I just always did unless there was something very rare that happened. I obviously try to eat healthy as well and that's helped. And then just morning time of journaling and reading scripture, I call it the, this sounds very cheesy, but the spiritual stack and-

Carey Nieuwhof:

I like that.

Brett Hagler:

... it's about 30 minutes every morning except on the weekends sometimes I'm way more loose with it, and no matter what I have going on I just I prioritize those things. And those have just compounded into I think a good centering for the day and I think how we live our days is how we live our lives and now I'm seeing it over the years compound and so those are some of the things. And then some of the other habits that are maybe a little more entrepreneurial is I've just I've always believed in, and there's different philosophies for this so this has just been my opinion and what's worked, but I've always believed on setting clear focus goals with a timeline and then working backwards to make it happen.

Brett Hagler:

And so in the very beginning when I was just starting New Story I had no clue how to do 1,000 homes or to talk about all the stuff we talked about, literally Carey I had no clue, and so I just set a goal of just doing one house, right? And I always used to say, do for one family what I wish I could do for all, and that's how it started. And then it was, okay, let's try to do a community, and we tried to do a community of 200 houses, a whole community, it was about 1,000 people, and that was the goal, and then it was, how could we 3D print one house? I could go on and on but it was just setting these really clear goals with ideally a timeline and that forces you to have some urgency and to build momentum in doing that, so those are some of the things that I've done.

Brett Hagler:

And then I'd say the last habit from an entrepreneurial perspective was it's just trying to make the most of the biggest opportunities. And so the big home run opportunities they don't come around that often, right? And no matter what we're doing but sometimes they do come around and I just always try my best to be so overly prepared for those opportunities to do whatever I could to try to make the most of that opportunity. And that's something that has certainly helped us and I think any kind of younger aspiring leader or entrepreneur has the choice to do all those things that I mentioned.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, you mentioned Andy and I think I'm paraphrasing him so I probably am going to get this wrong but I've heard him say, "If you live a very boring life you can have a very meaningful life," it is getting enough sleep, it's working out, it's eating relatively similar meals that are healthy, it's the patterns and the compound interest over time, and you're not doing these crazy things but that is what produces crazy results, and I've seen similar principles at work in my own life. That's super helpful.

Brett Hagler:

Of course you have. Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You have to read a lot or learn a lot to stay current in your field, things are changing all the time, technology, you're big into technology, is changing all the time. What are your reading habits, you're reading disciplines, or maybe I'd say learning disciplines that help you stay current?

Brett Hagler:

Yeah. Okay. So learning disciplines I would say I am trying to learn, at least from a New Story standpoint, things that are relative to us and that could be under technology or the innovation side. So I'll give you

an example, right? Because families making repayments for basically mortgages that we're starting to work on or have been working on that is a reason why I should learn a lot about cryptocurrency, right? Because the use case is almost all the families we work with are unbanked but they have cell phones and there's volatility with whatever currency they have and usually in the country that they're in and so that actually makes sense for me to invest time and to really learn about cryptocurrency, right? That's an example.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, what nation has made crypto their official currency? Is that El Salvador or Ecuador?

Brett Hagler:

El Salvador.

Carey Nieuwhof:

El Salvador has actually made it their official currency. Yeah.

Brett Hagler:

That's right. And that's why we're just about to start a project there issuing the first Bitcoin based mortgage program for families that are unbanked that we work with but they all have cell phones and we're issuing mortgages kind of in a Bitcoin based model on a blockchain called the Lightning Network, so that's an example of how learning has turned into something that we can try and pilot. And then other ways of learning, I mean, for me mostly it's a combination of businessy or kind of startup technology stuff and then I'm a Christian so also things from a faith perspective that I can, so those are the two things that I'm mostly learning. And it's a lot of dichotomies I find and I like learning from different people that what they're saying they probably wouldn't fully agree with each other if they were in the same room but I can pick and choose what I want to learn from them, right? So let me give you two examples.

Brett Hagler:

So one of the books I just read that I actually believe in almost 100% of all the principles in there is a more popular book called Amp It Up. And it's been popular in the kind of technology startup world, it's by a three time successful CEO founder who's a CEO of Snowflake right now called Frank Sloatman. And the book is all about just pace and speed and high expectation and high standards, right? So I'm reading that and then I'm also reading Soul Keeping and I'm reading The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry, and then I'm going back and I'm reading this other book by Tim Grover called Relentless, he was the trainer to Michael Jordan and Kobe and now he trains executives.

Brett Hagler:

And so there's a lot of dichotomy in what's being shared but I'm trying to pick and choose. Okay. For me as a leader that has identified the things that are most important in my life which for me it's two things at the top, it's my faith so it's desiring Jesus above all else and then now it's my soon to be wife, right? And it's Demi and those are my top priorities, and then of course it's loving others and then leadership at New Story. And so I'm reading these things and I'm trying to pick and choose what's relevant to me given the priorities that I've made in this season of my life, which the season of my life six years ago was different, I was in a different season where I had different priorities so.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, I think that dichotomous learning, if you want to call it that, I think it's a good thing. It was so funny, I was looking at my table yesterday upstairs and I had two books on it, one was by Ramit Sethi, I Will Teach You to Be Rich, and the other was Glenn Packiam, The Resilient Pastor, and I thought, I don't know how many coffee tables actually have both books being read by the same person because they feel like two different universes, right?

Brett Hagler:

I love that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But I'm like, that's kind of my world, I really like Ramit, I really like Glenn and that's cool. And if you look at my shelf it's a bunch of weirdness but I think it is that that sparks. Do you find that that sparks creative and original thought by pulling in from a variety of conflicting sources or different sources?

Brett Hagler:

Yes. I am obsessed with that idea of what you just shared, those dichotomies. And I think it works when you're secure and rooted in your identity and what you've prioritized, right? So Carey obviously I know you're a very intentional person, you have priorities in your own life, and so you're able to go and listen to all types of things from all types of people with different backgrounds and you're secure enough in your identity and what you believe and who you are to then pull the things out that spark original thought. And then I do the same thing, I get so many concepts or ideas and then I'm not believing all of them or maybe I'm not acting on all of them and I'm being grounded in some of the other resources or learning materials that help me be grounded and humble in what I want to do.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, it's interesting, even I'm not preaching as much anymore but when I was preaching I would sometimes pull out a book on atheism or read about Buddhism and you would think, oh, that's going to destroy your faith, actually it deepened mine which is really bizarre and gave me a better understanding of where other people are coming from. So not that I make that my daily diet but there's a lot of fear I think sometimes in Christian circles that a bigger worldview is going to lead to a collapsing worldview and actually to me it seems to have rooted me deeper spiritually. Yeah.

Brett Hagler:

Same.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay. So crypto, FinTech, the unbankable, this is a recurring theme in our culture right now and there's a million opinions about the blockchain, the metaverse, crypto, we've done a mini series on that here, what are some reliable sources that you turn to for learning on crypto? Can you just name whether that's a writer or a book or a website that you revisit or someone you follow on social that you're like, this is pretty good stuff. And not just, oh, I want to make a whole bunch of money off in NFT but, no, you're actually going to be banking people using crypto who own homes so that's why I'm very interested in your answer because it's not speculative.

Brett Hagler:

Yeah. Absolutely. So let's see off the top of my head, there's a venture capital firm that's gotten pretty large now called Andreessen Horowitz, it's called A16Z, and they were one of the first ones to create a larger cryptocurrency fund, this was back in the day where almost everybody told them, no, you shouldn't do that, and they did it. And what I love about them is they've brought on a lot of really smart people that whether they were a combination of people that have come from Washington or in government and from folks with more of a global perspective. And obviously that's helping them inform them on their investment decisions but I think it's very sound and I think it's a lot of what they put out is wise so I learn a lot from that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

No, I just wanted to ask, is that Chris Dixon? Am I getting that name right?

Brett Hagler:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay. So Chris Dixon. Yeah. I was just trying to get the name right. I've written some of what he... and listened to several interviews with him, do you find him to be a reliable source?

Brett Hagler:

I do. I don't know Chris personally but everyone I know that knows him speaks very highly of him and, yes, so I think that that's very reliable. Let's see. There's a podcast, it's a little biased just because it's very bullish on crypto, but there's a podcast called The Pomp Podcast which I think has a lot of wise people on that as well.

Carey Nieuwhof:

P-U-M-P or P-O-M-P?

Brett Hagler:

P-O-M-P.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Pomp.

Brett Hagler:

Anthony Pompliano, yeah-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay. Got it.

Brett Hagler:

... he's a New Story supporter and has been great as far as bringing people on, it's a daily podcast. But I think I've tried to learn the most just directly from just conversations and reaching out to people and

telling them about our specific use case, right? And so I think for anybody that wants to learn more about the world of cryptocurrency which, I mean, isn't even in the first ending in my opinion of what it's going to be this decade it's so broad, it's so huge. I would recommend trying to pick a use case or an area that you're very intrigued by, right? So if you were an artist and you hear about NFTs and you like to make music, well, how could that apply to what I could be working on in the future? Right?

Brett Hagler:

And then in that niche then you can find places and people that you can reach out to and you can talk to and learn and so that's what we've tried to do. And we've learned a ton and we're about to, yeah, embark on a really exciting project in El Salvador. That will be the first time low income families will pay a mortgage in a Bitcoin based model that will be on a blockchain using what's called the Lightning Network. And so that was almost a year of learning for me and my team and we're still going to learn a ton. And families we work with in El Salvador are literally going to be getting invoices, this has happened already, we have eight homes that have been completed and they're getting invoices on their phone to click a button and pay that monthly amount in Bitcoin, that's been on their phone. And so that's been a fun journey but we have a lot to learn and again, you only learn by doing.

Brett Hagler:

I can't tell you how many people have been and I get it, people can be very skeptical and they can say, well, oh my gosh, how are you going to do the training? How are people going to understand this? The volatility risk, all of that stuff, right? Which is valid and is good but we believe the best way that we're going to learn is to learn doing. And that's what we're doing this year with the hope of proving out a simplified way for unbanked families that don't trust a traditional banking system that isn't set up for them to be able to make payments on their phone in a way that is tracked in the blockchain which is super transparent as opposed to trying to track everything with cash payments, that is the least transparent method of doing it. And the servicing cost of humans going and collecting it and tracking it and storing it and all that stuff has been a disaster for vulnerable families and so that's why we're excited about piloting this model.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. I imagine you probably also follow what Vance Roush is doing as well, do you?

Brett Hagler:

Absolutely. Yeah, absolutely. I love Vance, he's actually become a friend and I'm a big fan of Overflow and what they're doing to try to modernize the way that giving can be done on an individual level and corporate level as well.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, and for impact and not for profit church leaders in America the issue of being unbanked is actually not an overseas issue or a Latin America issue, it's also an America and Canadian issue, there's a lot of unbanked North Americans who just for whatever reason and often it shows up in minority environments do not trust the financial system and it's a major issue. So this will be a wonderful challenge to solve over the next little while as well which will be fantastic. Okay. I'd love for you to give some advice to young leaders who are saying, man, I want to do what Brett is doing, I get inspired by their story and we do love to profile young entrepreneurs on this podcast. So if somebody wants to get started what is a good place to start? What are some mistakes that they might avoid? Just give them

your 60 seconds on the long elevator ride up to wherever you're going and give them your pitch, what would you say?

Brett Hagler:

Well, I can just tell you that, to start, a year before New Story was created I vividly remember sitting in my very low cost small little apartment just sitting there reading books with zero accomplishments under my belt, actually two failures under my belt. And so you don't have to come from any place, in my opinion, of prestige or a high resume or all these qualifications. I think the most important thing to start is deciding that you want to go against the mainstream and that you are interested in doing things differently and that you want to be obsessive with learning and starting to put that into action. And so I always say to dream big but to start small, as I've already mentioned in our conversation for us that was literally starting with one house Carey, I'm not kidding, it was putting together a plan of how to do one house and build one house and we started with that and that got some traction and went further along.

Brett Hagler:

But it's so easy to get paralyzed with the ambiguity and not knowing things and that causes people not to start and it causes them to punt it and to put it off. And the gravitational pull is always going to be to doing what's normal, doing what's kind of expected by other people around you and a lot of people are going to raise their eyebrows if you tell them, hey, I'm going to do this thing that is a little risky or I'm going to take a salary cut to try this or sorry, my nights and weekends now are dedicated to this thing, that's not normal, right? A lot of people are not doing that. And so the good news is that that's a choice, you get to make that choice.

Brett Hagler:

And what we did in the very beginning was I was lucky to meet two co-founders but the way that I met them was because I have this term we used called manufactured serendipity. So because I was out there trying to create New Story and fund one house and needed to build a website then I had to find somebody that could build the website for me, right? Who ended up becoming my co-founder Matthew Marshall. And then Matthew was interested in a lot of the same things I was interested in really around social entrepreneurship and he hosted a really small meet up. It was 10 people and he had an email list and so he was like, hey, come pitch New Story at this.

Brett Hagler:

And it was just 10 of us with bad pizza in this random place and it turns out my other now co-founder showed up to that, right? Because she was also interested in social entrepreneurship and wanting to be around other people that were thinking that way and so you have to put yourself in those environments. And then just going a little bit further on this story, we came together and we set a goal, that goal was one house to start, right? And then that grew to a street after that. And we would meet weekly and we would set weekly goals in the very beginning and we had timelines, we had urgency, and we just decided to do that. And anybody listening you can decide to do that and you can start small and that will be my recommendation.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's a great recommendation. Well, if people want the latest on New Story and what you're doing where can they learn more?

Brett Hagler:

So New Story you can go to newstorycharity.org and our social media handle is just New Story Charity. We also have a documentary that is coming out that's new and that URL will be newstorydreams.org. The documentary is called No Small Dreams and we actually talk about the dreams of the families that we've got to partner with, our own entrepreneurial story and the co-founders story and dreams. So that would probably be the best way to learn about us and that's coming out, it's about a 25 minute documentary about our entrepreneurial story and the families that we get to work with. And then for me personally my name on Twitter and Instagram is just Brett Hagler.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Great. And once again for the documentary the URL where people will find it.

Brett Hagler:

It's newstorydreams.org.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Amazing.

Brett Hagler:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Brett, thank you so much so I appreciate you.

Brett Hagler:

Love talking with you and learning from you. So, I appreciate it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. I really, really enjoyed that and it challenged me. It's funny how when you eliminate all of the options you can get better at what you do and that can stimulate growth. So if you want more you can go to get transcripts at carrynieuwhof.com/episode491, we covered a lot of material in this and all the links are in the show notes. I also want to thank our partners Pro MediaFire and Generis, if you're a church or a nonprofit looking to grow online you can apply for their growth program today, Pro MediaFire that is, by going to promediafire.com/growth and if you want to learn how to accelerate your generosity with a free 45 minute discovery session you can go to generis.com/carey, that's G-E-N-E-R-I-S.com/carey. Next episode, well, we go deep, my guest is Glenn Packiam and if you have felt like your job description has become impossible particularly if you're a church leader or an impact organization leader, yeah, you're facing stacked expectations. Here's an excerpt from the next episode.

Glenn Packiam:

I think it's been weird for a while in terms of expectations but what I think is happening Carey is that these expectations on pastors they're not replacing one another. For example, decades ago maybe it was, my pastor needs to be a great theologian or speaker and then my pastor needs to be a great therapist or insightful counselor, it's not as if those expectations have replaced one another, I think

they've just stacked and so we just keep adding to it so it's theologian, communicator, counselor, entrepreneur, social activist, political commentator, and it's like that Jenga block, it's just about to tip over because we keep stacking expectations.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So that's next time on the podcast. If you subscribe you're not going to miss it and you will also not miss Andy Stanley, Susan Cain, Chris Bail, Dan Pink, Albert Tate, Vanessa Van Edwards, Ramit Sethi, who else have we got? Chad Veach, Nona Jones, and so many more come up on this podcast. We've got a great year lined up for you of guests, and I'd love for you to subscribe. I know a lot of you are new every month and perhaps every episode and I want to say welcome, I'm really glad you're here. And if you wouldn't mind sharing on the socials, leaving us a rating and review, I would be so, so grateful. And if you like this episode and you want to connect a little bit more the way to connect with me personally these days is I am hanging out in The Art of Leadership Academy, it's a brand new thing that we set up and it's got hundreds of leaders in it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And if you go in there today it's brand new but the dialogue is amazing, we have all of my premium courses inside, I'm doing live coaching, I interact with people and we can go deeper, and you're going to discover an amazing tribe of mentors and also friends. And you can get that at theartofleadershipacademy.com, \$397 a year gets you your membership and I'll tell you it's exceeded our expectations. Every once in a while you build something you think, oh, I hope this is going to work, and I'll tell you, it is a lot of fun. If you're looking for real solid support and you're tired of the drone online and you're ready to get into real community head on over to theartofleadershipacademy.com, I'd love to welcome you in and we can connect over there. Well, thank you so much for listening, we will do this again real soon, 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.