

Announcer:

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 499 of the podcast. It's Carey here. I hope our time together today helps you thrive in life and leadership. Very excited to have Daniel Pink back on the podcast today. We are going to talk about regrets. I don't know whether you have any regrets, but wow, it's fascinating. We also get into his writing habits, how he was a speech writer for Vice President Al Gore, and why people seem to be floundering with negative emotions. I touch on this in a number of interviews lately. It's just something I keep seeing. Dan is just a great thinker, and well, we'll tell you more about him in a minute.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Also, for those of you who are regular listeners of the podcast, this is the final week with the old format. Now, it's the same show, we're just changing up the music. That helping you lead like never before, yeah, this is the last episode we're going to use it. I thought 499 episodes into it, by the time we hit episode 500, we'll have some new music with the show. So that starts on the next episode. I know we're going to divide the audience now between people who liked it the old way, people who like the new way, but you're going to find out in episode 500. I'm actually excited for the change.

Carey Nieuwhof:

This episode is brought to you by the Art of Leadership Academy and by Pro MediaFire. You can go to the [preachingworkshop.com](http://preachingworkshop.com). For those of you who are preachers, I've got a free preaching workshop coming up where you'll learn to preach more relevant, engaging, and memorable sermons. It's free. Go to [preachingworkshop.com](http://preachingworkshop.com) to register for free today. And by Pro MediaFire, you can submit your application for their Growth Program by going to [Promediafire.com/growth](http://Promediafire.com/growth).

Carey Nieuwhof:

Daniel H. Pink's books have helped readers and organizations around the world rethink how they live and operate. He is the author of the New York Times Best-seller's *A Whole New Mind*, *Drive*, *To Sell Is Human*, and *When*. His books have sold millions of copies and have been translated into 42 languages. They've won multiple awards. He lives in Washington, D.C. I think you'll love our conversation today.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Hey, pastors, if you are preaching regularly or semi-regularly, I am hosting a free preaching workshop that will help you preach more engaging, relevant, and memorable sermons. This one's free. It's part of what I'm doing in the Art of Leadership Academy. It's a free preaching workshop. It's just one hour on two days, June 20th and June 21st. It's live and it covers a few of the tried and true strategies for preaching better sermons. On one of the days, I'm going to show you how to craft a clear and compelling bottom line that your audience will remember for weeks if not for years.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I've had people using this formula come back to me a decade later and go, "Remember when you said..." Well, what do you need to do to get people to remember what you said for a decade? I'll show you exactly how to do it. Then for those of you who use notes, when you speak, I want to show you in the second day how to deliver a talk without using notes. And there's a lot more. So you could learn this a hard way or you could jump onto the free preaching workshop. The registration will get you free access to everything in the workshop, including the two live sessions, resources to support the application of the teaching I'm giving you, and a private Facebook group where you can meet and grow with other pastors.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So register today. Here's how you do it. Go to [preachingworkshop.com](http://preachingworkshop.com), [preachingworkshop.com](http://preachingworkshop.com), and I'll see you later on in June inside that. Then thank you to our partnership at Pro MediaFire. So, question for you. Do you believe there's a first mover advantage? I do. Well, early adopters are always a step ahead. People ask me all the time, it's like, "Carey, how did you get 20, almost 22 and a half million downloads on the podcast?" It's like, well, I started a few years ago, right? So early adopters are always a step ahead. That's why you want to be aware of hybrid tech for online outreach.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Now, Pro MediaFire is working on hybrid tech with one goal for you, creating growth on autopilot. This hybrid technology for online growth does a few things. First, it increases your online engagement. Second, it actually saves you and your team time and money. And third, it provides you with the steady stream of online and in-person visitors. So plain and simple, it's powered by the strategy of humans, but faster in driving growth than just hiring a physical team member. The new hybrid technology is available through the Growth Program. It's an invite-only cohort.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Pro MediaFire is opening up a cohort for larger organizations in addition to small and midsize. So small and large organizations are welcome to apply. Submit your application for the Growth Program today at [promediafire.com/growth](http://promediafire.com/growth). That's [promediafire.com/growth](http://promediafire.com/growth). And now, my conversation about regrets and so much more with Dan Pink. Dan, welcome back to the podcast. It's great to have you.

Daniel Pink:

Carey, thanks for having me back.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So I'd love to start here. We're just chatting very briefly. You said writing doesn't get any easier, launching books doesn't get any easier. This is your seventh book. What are your writing habits and how have they changed over the years?

Daniel Pink:

Okay. I'll take the first part... the second part first. I think they've changed over the years and that they've become much more systematic. I've become much more methodical. It took a while, I think probably after my first book, to figure this out. What I do when I'm writing a book, when I'm in the

writing mode of a book, or even in the writing mode of a long article, is that I carve out the morning to do that.

Daniel Pink:

So I come into my office, I give myself a quota of words that I have to hit, and I don't do anything until I hit that number. So I don't open up my email, I don't bring my phone with me into the office. I don't do anything else until I hit that number. Once I hit that number, I am exonerated. I'm free to do whatever I need to do that day. But until I hit that number, I am not. Then I do it the next day and then I do it the next day and then... You get the idea.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I get it.

Daniel Pink:

So I'm pretty methodical. If I sat around and waited to be inspired, I would never have written anything. I find that I get inspired when I sit down and do the work. I've said this before to a couple other interviewers. I really look at writing almost like bricklaying. You come in, you lay some bricks, because that's your job, you lay the bricks, you come in the next day, you lay some more bricks. Then you go look and say, "Okay, is everything straight? Oh! Nope, got to move that one." So you just come in and you do your job every single day.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So what is your word count? I'm curious. I guess it might-

Daniel Pink:

It depends.

Carey Nieuwhof:

... vary on a book versus an article. Yeah-

Daniel Pink:

It varies based on where I am in a project or something like that. For some people, I'm a very slow writer. When I write a book or write an article, the whole reason that I'm writing the book or article is that I'm figuring it out as I'm writing. So if you ask me to write something about something I already know or something I've already figured out, then I can do that pretty quickly. But typically, with a book, I have a vague sense of what I want to say, but I don't know fully and I'm trying to discover that. So it takes a long time. So to answer your question more directly, it varies. Sometimes it's 500, sometimes it's 800. It's very rarely over 1,000. It's never over 1,000.

Carey Nieuwhof:

See, this is fascinating because I think people who don't write for a living would go, "1,000 words, you can whip that off in a half hour," which on one level is true, or an hour, but not good words, right? So talk-

Daniel Pink:

They don't even have to be good words. I mean, here's the thing. I can't whip out 1,000 words in an hour that says anything meaningful, that helps me figure out what I want to say. No way.

Carey Nieuwhof:

A 1,500-word blog post these days will probably take me... And blogs are almost like mosquitoes, they come and go. But 1,500-word blog post might take me three or four hours now, whereas I think when I was less disciplined, it took less time. Why mornings, Dan? What is it about mornings that made you incorporate that as your discipline?

Daniel Pink:

Part of it also was I wrote a book about timing that showed that we perform differently at different times of day. And for most of us, myself included, we're more vigilant early in the day rather than later in the day. We're less prone to falling prey to distractions. So for me, that's a big reason that I do it in the morning. Also, I think there's something to be said, not in every single case, but in many cases for doing the most important thing first. When I'm writing a book, that's easily the most important thing.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. You were a speech writer. I didn't know that until just recently. But you worked in Washington, D.C.

Daniel Pink:

100 years ago. Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Was that in the Clinton administration? Did you write speeches for... Was it Robert Reich? Have I got that right?

Daniel Pink:

I did that during the early days of the Clinton administration. Then in the middle days of the Clinton administration, I was the chief speech writer for Vice President Al Gore.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Really? Okay. Talk to us about speech writing? What are the disciplines, rhythms? Yeah, just take us into that world.

Daniel Pink:

It's very different from what I do now because that's much more... In those days, I could write 1,000 words in an hour. I mean, it's a very interesting job. I was very lucky to have it. I was glad to be able to have some good bosses and be able to modestly serve my country a tiny little bit. It's a very, very fast-paced and very demanding job. It's not like what I do now with books. It's like, okay, let me do seven drafts and let me read it out loud and let me have my wife read it out loud to me.

Daniel Pink:

It's more like, okay, you got to bang this out right now. You rip it out of your printer and hand it off and just pray that things don't go terribly south on you. But it's a pretty cool, fun, interesting lively job to have when you're... I was quite young when I did it. So it's a fun job to have in that situation. For me, sort of took a circuitous route in that I thought that early in my life that I wanted to work in politics. Then once I started working in politics, I decided that I didn't want to work in politics. That was a very interesting-

Carey Nieuwhof:

What changed your mind?

Daniel Pink:

Again, this is a long time ago. It was so incredibly difficult to get things done. I felt like so much of what we were doing was just jockeying for short-term advantage. That was part of it. The other thing was is that over time I discovered that I wanted to be a writer myself. And one of the things about speech writing is you're not writing for yourself, you're not writing what you think. That's not your job. Your job is to give voice to somebody else.

Daniel Pink:

A concern that I had was that if I got too good at that, if I spent... Not too good at it, but if I spent too much time doing that, I would start to lose like, what did I think? But it took me a while. It took me into my late 20s, early 30s to realize that when I grew up I wanted to become a writer, that I didn't want to work in politics, that I wanted to do my own thing. And that's fine.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. It's funny. You would almost think that it was speech writing for the vice president of the United States that might require 400 words a day and yet you're banging out-

Carey Nieuwhof:

... 1,000 words in an hour. Yeah, you would think, "Okay, this is the Vice President of the United States, we have to take weeks to formulate this message." And how old were-

Daniel Pink:

You would be wrong about that. So let me just abuse you of that right now, Carey. Do not think that the people who are working in the White House are sitting around in smoking jackets and puffing pipes and thinking great thoughts and whispering them in the ears of the powerful. It is much more akin to an emergency room where you're just stitching up bodies and hoping they don't die on your watch.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow!

Daniel Pink:

That's more of the atmosphere.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. And you were young. How old were you when you were writing speeches? Because this is something I've seen. A lot of the people around powerful politicians in Washington and Ottawa are extremely young. How young were you?

Daniel Pink:

I mean, I started doing this stuff in my 20s. I was in my early 30s when I worked for the vice president.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Why do you think so many young people end up there? I mean-

Daniel Pink:

Because they're incredibly demanding jobs, you have to work all the time. Someone my age or when I was younger and I had kids, I didn't want to work all the time on that kind of thing. I mean, you're working all the time. You have to have 100% commitment. I think that's perfectly fine. I'm not complaining about that. I think that's completely legitimate. You have to be all in. You have to want to work all the time and be willing to work all the time and be willing to work demanding, ruling hours for very low pay.

Daniel Pink:

And that's a perfect recipe for people who are young. I ended up getting out around the time that my wife and I had our first kid. I realized pretty quickly that being a parent and having that kind of demanding job wasn't sustainable for the kind of life that we wanted to live.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Another thing that has got me interested, I asked Susan Cain about this recently, but you, Susan, and Adam Grant and Malcolm Gladwell have formed the Next Big Idea Club, which is great. It really came on my radar more recently when you nominated *At Your Best*, the group nominated *At Your Best* as one of the books to watch in the fall, which was a huge honor. I'm curious, you have some pretty esteemed colleagues in that group, all of whom are very different. What are you learning from other writers like Adam, Malcolm, and Susan? I'm curious what your take is on that.

Daniel Pink:

Oh, I learned so much. I learned how they approach their work. But this is true not only of those three who are terrific writers and first-rate human beings, all three of them. I mean, all three are just lovely, wonderful human beings, beyond being talented writers. So I learned from them on just how to be a good person. I think that they have somewhat different approaches. I read Susan's recent book and I found it really compelling and really interesting. I learned something from that. I think that what Malcolm is doing in audio is fascinating.

Daniel Pink:

And I've learned a lot about that, about storytelling in different forms and about being a little bit agnostic, being more agnostic at least, about what medium you convey things in. I'm in awe of Adam's ability to crank stuff out. The guy is just incredibly productive. The amount of stuff that he produces is just breathtaking. So, all kinds of stuff. But it's not only that. I mean, I learn from every writer I read. I

learn from you, I learn from everybody whose book I read. And I think that's a healthy way to approach it, not only as a writer, but just as a human being.

Daniel Pink:

I don't think that anybody should take any of my books and say, "Oh, I have figured out the plan. This is the gospel." I think what you do is you read and you hear and you listen and you absorb and you take pieces from many, many sources and fashion it into something that is uniquely your point of view and your perspective and your approach to life.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, that's a challenge, I think, for a lot of people. And we have a lot of content creators, whether that's preachers, writers, podcasters, who listen to this podcast. And I think that's always one of the challenges. I've found for myself as a communicator, sometimes if I over-listen to or over-read a certain person, I end up almost becoming a mimic.

Daniel Pink:

Interesting. Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

How do you figure that out? What is your filter for like, hey, I can learn from Malcolm Gladwell, but this is what Dan does. What does that filter look like for you?

Daniel Pink:

It is a great question. It's interesting. I think that when one is starting out as a writer, there is room for mimicry. There is room for doing that. But I think that period of mimicry should end fairly quickly. And I think that inevitably, you begin to adjust to your own way of thinking and expressing. So I think that the way to avoid that comes, I guess, from two ways. One is just pure experience, but the other one is reading widely, not just reading one person.

Daniel Pink:

And actually, Carey, not just even reading one genre, but reading widely across multiple disciplines, across multiple forms, and increasingly now, different kinds of media. So listening to stuff like podcasts like you're doing or watching things and just being exposed to different kinds of media, different forms of storytelling, different types of ideas, different disciplines from which those ideas emerge. I think that is a good antidote to mimicry. The other thing that's an antidote to mimicry is doing the work. Sometimes one reverts to mimicry when one hasn't done the work and is feeling lazy. But if you show up and do the work, you're less likely to mimic.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's a really good point.

Daniel Pink:

I mean, I hate to sound like a hard-, but I actually am in this regard. I mean, the solution to most issues, I think, as for writers, is to shut up and get back to work.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What was it? Somebody said-

Daniel Pink:

I say that to myself multiple times a week.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Shut up, get back to work. No, somebody said that the cure for writers' block is writing and I'm like, "Yeah, that really resonates." If you feel block, just keep writing. What are some sources? And I want to get into your new book because there's all a lot there. But before we do what, what are some sources then as you are reading widely, as you are listening to different kinds of media? Are there any that pop to mind as like, "Wow! I'm so glad I read this," or, "I'm so glad I'm exploring this area."?

Daniel Pink:

In terms of topics or?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, it could be topics or authors or anything that you've seen that really you were glad you did, so to speak. For example, I'm a pastor by training and I listen to business podcasts incessantly and other leadership podcasts and I think I'm a better leader as a result.

Daniel Pink:

Yeah. I'm sure, I'm sure. I tend to listen to and read a fair amount of science-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow!

Daniel Pink:

... both... Not so much in the realm of like physics and astronomy, but very much in the realm of certainly social science, social psychology, economics, linguistics, but also biological sciences. So I find that I read a fair amount of science just because I'm looking for first principles, I'm looking for what's going on underneath the hood. But I think it's also important to read good fiction. And I don't mean good, I don't mean high falutin fiction, but just good fiction because good fiction teaches you how to tell a story.

Daniel Pink:

It's also a study in behavior because you have a character who is trying to achieve something and has obstacles in the way in almost every piece of fiction. I mean, I'm old, but I think that the daily newspaper, especially newspapers like the New York Times and the Washington Post and the Wall Street Journal are among the best of value you can have in reading. For a couple of bucks, you have some really, really great writing, incredible breadth of what it covers.

Daniel Pink:



So I'm somebody who still reads a print newspaper and I read all the sections. I mean, I write about business and so I read the business section, I read the art section, I read the sports section. I think it's important to be pretty eclectic about what you read.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's interesting that you mentioned science because now when I go back over your books, I'm like, yeah, you're not writing in the field of science, it's more social science than anything. But I see that kind of scientific approach show up in your writing. It's very methodical, it's very researched, it's very detailed. When, which we didn't interview when that came out, and really influenced some of my thinking for *At Your Best*, that was a highly researched book and I think that adds a lot of credibility to it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So let's talk about regret. You got a brand new book, which I really enjoyed, called *The Power of Regret*, for those of you who are watching this via YouTube, *How Looking Backward Moves Us Forward*. I'm glad you went there. People ask me, because I get interviewed from time to time, do you have any regrets? And I know what you're supposed to say, Dan, but I don't say that. I don't say that. I say, "Actually, I have a lot of regrets. I mean, where do you want to start?"

Carey Nieuwhof:

One of the great regrets was my 30s. That was a period of really fast growth in our church at the time. I was leading a church in those days. But what I sacrificed was my health and my family and it led me to burnout at 41. The last 15 years of my life have been an unraveling of that and a rebuilding from the foundation. But when I tell people I have regrets, it's like they look at me as though I have three heads. So why is it that so many of us are afraid to admit that we have regrets.

Daniel Pink:

Because we don't realize how universal regret is. Regret is one of the most universal emotions that human beings experience. It is ubiquitous. It is arguably the most common negative emotion that we experience. I think that's one. So we think that when we've experienced regret, that we're somehow different. We're not. It's the most normal emotion, one of the most normal emotions that we have. The second thing is no one's taught us how to deal with it. Because it feels bad, we're inclined to try to ignore it, and when that doesn't work, we end up wallowing in it.

Daniel Pink:

So we need the coping tools to be able to respond to it effectively. Yeah, I think those are the main reasons. It's interesting you say that, Carey, because what I found is that a lot of times when I talk about my regrets or when I mention this... And one reason I got into this topic is that people actually had a different response, they actually wanted... If you introduce one of your regrets, they often will offer one of theirs. That is, I think this is a conversation that people want to have, that-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, that's good to know.

Daniel Pink:

... that people actually appreciate the taboo being removed. One of the things I'm trying to do with this book is normalize regrets because they're normal. Everybody has them, and I think that once you say that to people, there's a little bit of a sense of relief. "Oh my God! I'm not the only one." I think one of the big problems here, especially with younger people with negative emotions in general, is that when they feel a negative emotion, they think there's something wrong with them. Because as they say, "Oh, I feel crappy. I'm doing something wrong. Let me look around. Oh my God! Everybody else is perfect. I am deeply flawed." That's what's dangerous, especially when we don't give people the tools to respond to that, tools to cope with that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What are some of your regrets when you look back on your life?

Daniel Pink:

I have a lot of regrets. I mean, in what domain of life or what kind of regrets? I got a whole menu of them for long.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Let's talk professionally and personally. What's a professional regret? What's a personal regret?

Daniel Pink:

Yeah. I have a lot of professional regrets, but it's not a huge professional regret, but it's one that I've been thinking about, is that I never had a mentor. I regret that now. The reasons are a mix. Part of it is that I never knew that was a thing. I wasn't really aware that was a thing and that was something that was valuable. The second part is that I think part of it was that I felt like at some level I didn't need one, that I had it all figured out, that why would I want something like that? I got it all down.

Daniel Pink:

When I see people who have had mentors who have helped guide them, who have helped them figure out how to navigate terrain, I regret not having that for myself. If you say to me, "Who is your mentor?" I would say, "Nobody." It's not like I was neglected, it's not like I was a... Oh, wow! I look so different from the... Being a straight, white male born in America, I'm so different from the people who could have been mentors. I mean, it wasn't that. It was that I didn't know and I didn't care and I missed the boat. So much of it is on me. That's one professional regret.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow! Yeah, I missed a mentor too along the way as well. What about a personal regret when you look back on your personal life?

Daniel Pink:

I have a lot of regrets from earlier in my life about kindness. It's a weird kind of thing, Carey, in that when I... For this book, I collected a lot of regrets. And they are regrets ultimately about kindness, that have to do with bullying. So moral regrets, people doing the wrong thing by bullying. My regret is almost like a moral regret by inaction. What I mean by that is that there were many situations in my life, especially when I was younger, where... I was never a bully, but I would be in situations where someone was being especially excluded.

Daniel Pink:

Someone was being excluded, someone was being left out, someone was not being treated right. And here's the thing. It's not like I can't say I didn't see it. I saw it. It's not like I can say, "Oh! I didn't know it was wrong." I knew it was wrong and I didn't do anything. And that bugs me. So the real question then is less of, what's my regret? But what do I do with it? And I think it's very instructive here. So at a top level, what regrets do is they clarify what we value and they teach us how to do better.

Daniel Pink:

So for me, if I have this regret that is lingered for 30 years... And that's a deeper regret than not having a mentor for me, the kindness regrets. If I have a regret that has lingered for 30 years, that's telling me something. It's a signal, it's telling me what I value. It's telling me that I might not know at a conscious level, but what it seems to be manifest as day is that I value kindness and that I feel like crap when I don't show kindness. When you start thinking about that, reflecting on that, what I realize is that a lot of the people I admire, what do I admire about them? I admire their kindness.

Daniel Pink:

Then it's like, okay, what are you going to do about it then? What's the lesson you're going to learn? A lesson that I learn is you got to be kinder and kinder in a particular way because it's a particular behavior that bugs me, which was letting people be left out. This is not a big deal, I don't want to suggest a massive personal transformation or I don't want you to send a text message to the Pope nominating me for sainthood. And my wife can attest to this. If I'm in a social gathering and let's say there are clumps of people talking and I see someone who is marooned, isn't talking to anybody, I will go over to that person and talk to them.

Daniel Pink:

Or more likely, if I'm in a particular scrum of people, I will open up the circle and bring that person in. Now, it's a small gesture, but it's a gesture that I do, I think, fairly routinely, and that I do as a consequence of feeling so bad and feeling so regretful about what I didn't do earlier in my life.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, you raise this really interesting point or hint at it that we live in this cultural moment where we are pretty fragile and to admit you have regrets is almost like a character flaw or... I don't know what you would call it. And you open the book with a couple of fascinating stories, dumb tattoos, and then if I've got the pronunciation right, Edith Piaf, is that it? The French musician who became iconic for her song, No Regrets, but lived a terribly regretful life. Maybe tell us the story of Edith and some dumb tattoo stories because I think they encapsulated a lot of what is frustrating, I think, about this moment that we're in where we don't admit our weaknesses.

Daniel Pink:

Yeah. Yeah. Well, I mean, to me, I use the folks with tattoos as a way.... I mean, the people who I interviewed who had tattoos were lovely people. They had tattoos that say no regrets. I just use that as an example of your commitment to a particular belief. So let's go back to politics. You can put a sign in your yard saying Garcia for City Council, and that's a commitment, and you can put a bumper sticker in your car saying Romney for President and that's this commitment. You can make a campaign contribution, that's a commitment.

Daniel Pink:

But to ink something permanently on your body is a big commitment. So there are a lot of people out there with tattoos that say no regrets and I find that just fascinating, like that's the depth of belief. But at some level I think people are trying to convince themselves and they take that extreme action because they have questions about whether they actually believe that. So I have people with no regrets tattoos, but then of course I have a guy who got to a no regrets tattoo and then regretted it and had it removed. So I'm just using that as an example of the commitment to this belief.

Daniel Pink:

Now, Edith Piaf is another example of how this philosophy has penetrated our cultural consciousness. She was a French singer, she started singing this song, "No, I regret nothing, nothing at all." And it became an Anthem. It became one of the most popular songs in France. You hear it on North American television advertising now. The weird thing is that Edith Piaf led a miserable life. She was addicted to morphine, she was addicted to alcohol. She had a kid when she was 17 who she gave up who later died. She saddled one husband with massive amounts of debt. One of her lovers died.

Daniel Pink:

When we talked to her on her death bed, we have contemporaneous accounts of what it was like when she died. And she died at age 47 because of the way that she treated her body and mind. She didn't say as she was drawing her final breaths at the preposterously young age of 47, "Oh, I regret nothing. I regret nothing at all." She said the opposite. She said, "Every damn thing in this life you do, you have to pay for." So this is a person who had regrets. The point of all this is that what I'm trying to do is this no regrets philosophy is a little bit of a fog machine. It's obscuring the reality.

Daniel Pink:

And the reality is that everybody has regrets. Everybody has regrets. The only people who don't have regrets, as I've said many times, are five-year-olds, people with brain damage, and sociopaths. The rest of us have regrets and it doesn't feel good. But the fact that this emotion that doesn't feel good is so ubiquitous teaches us something, or it hints at something. It says, "This must be valuable in some way, it must be useful in some way." And when you go to the research, you find out, well, if we reckon with our regrets properly, we can become better negotiators.

Daniel Pink:

If we reckon with our regrets properly, we can become better problem solvers. If we reckon with our regrets properly, we can become better strategists, better parents, find more meaning in life. So this regret is part of our cognitive machinery, and with some very simple techniques, we can use it to live better and work smarter.

Carey Nieuwhof:

One of the challenges I've had over the years, and I don't do as many funerals anymore, I haven't been in leadership at a church for about seven years. Still go, still attend, still help, but not in leadership. But I did a lot of funerals over the years. And I watched this because I started in the '90s and went to... about 2015 where I was the lead pastor of a church, and I saw the way we talked about death and the way we talked about people changing. There's a term in theology where they talk about hagiographies.

Carey Nieuwhof:

In other words, it's not actually a biography, it's almost like we made this person into a saint. It seems to be the flavor of the month, even if someone led, like Edith Piaf, a very tragic life, that what we say about a person when they die is this was the kindest person in human history, so amazing, never hurt a flea, so generous, so compassionate. And part of me, it's my personality, is sitting there going, "Could someone just tell the truth?" What is at stake when we don't tell the truth about ourselves or our stories?

Daniel Pink:

Well, I mean, when we don't tell the truth about ourselves, we're missing the opportunity to develop into our best selves and contribute at our highest level. That's the most important thing, that not telling the truth about yourself is a way to thwart growth and learning and contribution, that most serious learning, most serious growth, and a huge amount of your ability to contribute and to achieve and to contribute to the world hinges on at least a modicum of self-awareness.

Daniel Pink:

There should be a little bit of self-delusion in there too. A little bit of sprinkle of self-delusion can be quite helpful. But self-awareness, I think, is critical. It's an interesting question about what do we say at funerals? I think that even if people are mouthing the words of this person was kind, this person was generous, that astute listeners, while they hear the lyrics, they can also hear the melody and the melody doesn't sound like that. I think we know when it's an authentic expression. David Brooks, the New York Times writer has a really nice way of putting this.

Daniel Pink:

He talks about various virtues in life and he talks about our resume virtues. "I was the CEO of this company and won this award." Or our funeral virtues, resume virtues and funeral virtues, and funeral virtues are what do people say to us? So when you presided over funerals, you didn't read somebody's resume. You didn't say, "Oh, wow! We're going to miss Maria. She increased sales in her division by 13% over the last fiscal year." I mean, that's not what we say about people at their funerals. We say about how they touched us. And if we have to confect that, I think at some level everybody knows.

Carey Nieuwhof:

About a year or two after I started, there was a guy named Walter who was well into his 70s. I'm like 31, 32. And after I finished a funeral, he pulled me aside and he just said, "Carey, I don't recognize the man you just buried." And I'm like, "What do you mean?"

Daniel Pink:

Interesting. That's fascinating.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And he goes, "He just wasn't that nice. He was a blankety-blank." And I'm like, "Okay, well, thank you." So what I try to do is I try to get the real story from the family and then if there is pain... There's almost always pain. I mean, once in a while, you really meet a saint, but there's always pain or nuance or an estranged daughter or a marriage that didn't work out. So what I'll try to do is I'll try to nuance or shade... That's not a time to throw shade on anybody who just died, that's not the moment.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But I think I want to say at least a sentence, if not a paragraph, to acknowledge that this was complex and that there are a variety of emotions. Everyone leaves a legacy of some good and some things that they wish they could do over. That seems to have addressed it, particularly where the pain is deep. Or it's almost like a wedding sometimes where this part of the family can't talk to that part of the family and you end up being the referee. That also happens at funerals. And some of this Dan, really struck me, having my background in Christian theology, as theological.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You can see in our culture that God was more at the center. And I don't mean morally. I just meant more people confess some kind of religious faith 100 years ago than they do today. So the theological framework that our culture had to talk about things, like sin and forgiveness and reconciliation, we've lost that. And I wonder if this ambiguity we have around regrets, feeling them but not being able to articulate them, is somehow bordering on a theological crisis with the vacuum that was left as the church, sometimes self-inflicted wounds, rode off into the sunset from a lot of mainstream culture.

Daniel Pink:

I think that there's something to that. I really do. I'm not sure it's purely theological. Well, it's sort of theological. I think there's something to that. Here's what I mean by that. I really do. I think that religious traditions... and not only Protestantism and not only Christianity, but a whole variety of religious traditions, are not bad at helping people contend with negative emotions. It's partly theological, but I think the real juice is in the practice. All right? Not so much in the underlying idea or the story from whatever the sacred text is, but from the practice itself.

Daniel Pink:

Let me tell you what I mean by that. So take Catholicism. Confession, repentance, that's a way to deal with negative emotion, right? It's a way to deal with certain kinds of regret. When I started collecting regrets from around the world, it was in some ways an online confessional. I'm not a priest, I have no aspiration to be a priest, but at some level, it was operating like that. So take that. Judaism has a day in the calendar, the day of atonement. They carve out a day, an entire day in the year, and your day in the year is to reflect and atone for your sins. It's a practice.

Daniel Pink:

Even things that are religion adjacent, like AA, which has a religious connection to it, it has a set of processes, literally a set of steps. Among those steps are acknowledging what you did wrong, going to the person who you wronged face to face and making amends. So I think that religious traditions give people the tools, the processes to deal with these negative emotions. It's why you presided over funerals. Every religious tradition has a mechanism, a way, a set of rituals and practices to deal with grief. Every single religious tradition has that.

Daniel Pink:

Secular society doesn't have that all the time. All right? Why? Because religious traditions help us make sense of negative emotions. They give us ways to cope with negative emotions. I think that secular society hasn't done a very good job of that. That is why many people are floundering. They're floundering because they feel a negative emotion, they don't know what to do with it. They don't have a

process, they don't have a system, they don't have a set of techniques. And worse, they often don't have a community to help them with that. And that's, I think, what faith traditions do.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. I hear all the time, particularly in the last decade, of people who are like, "Yeah, there's no funeral. We're just going to do a private burial," or whatever. And I'm like, "Okay." First of all, I understand why that happens. But secondly, there's a community that suffered loss here and I'm just wondering how we grieve it.

Daniel Pink:

I agree with that. I do. I mean, I think it's interesting. I think it's interesting that you will not find any faith tradition anywhere that doesn't have a set of rituals, that doesn't have actually a text or an incantation of sorts that helps people process a death, learn how to grieve, and make sense of this loss.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That ashes to ashes, dust to dust line that I've used, I don't know who wrote that, it's been around for centuries, that is such a moment. When you're standing by a graveside or you're in a chapel or a church and saying goodbye and the body is present or the ashes are present, that's just sobering. It sends chills up my spine. And I think it's therapeutic. I think it's therapeutic.

Daniel Pink:

And it's therapeutic for the entire community too because I think you're right, the community has suffered a loss and the community needs some sense making.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, I've told this story before. I don't think I've told it on the podcast. But I remember as a young pastor hearing about the stories... And the churches were very small at the time, so you know everybody's story. There were a couple of boys, teenagers, who in the 1970s... and I started in the '90s, 20 years later, went out on the lake. We a big lake near where I live. They were canoeing in the spring and they never came back. That was it. Bodies were never found. So the family didn't do a funeral because they kept expecting the bodies to be discovered.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And you wait a month and then a season and then, well, maybe next spring. They were never found. So two decades later, this kid from Toronto shows up on the scene. I remember walking with some of the dads who are now in their 70s, maybe it was 30 years prior to me getting there, and I remember asking one, "Shall we have a funeral?" And there was no body present. But decades later, we did a little private ceremony and you could see the relief in people. At the end of your book, you talk about... and I want to get the phrase right, you talk about what to do with your regrets and you... Here it is.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You talk about disclosing the regret. When I read that section, Dan, there's this passage in the end of the New Testament that says, "Confess your sins to each other." So full confession, most Protestant evangelical Christians never do that. It is a thing between you and God, it's you and God, and like, "I'm

not going to tell you my sin. Maybe I'll get outed one day if I really sin big, but I'm not telling you my sin." And I think it's killing us. Can you talk about the power of disclosing your regrets?

Daniel Pink:

Sure. There are multiple benefits to it. One of them is that disclosure is an unburdening. And I think that in the same way that your story of that community that finally had a funeral after two decades, it's an unburdening. You've been carrying something around and you put it down, you take it off of your back, you release yourself. So it's an unburdening. The second thing that disclosure itself does is that it builds affinity.

Daniel Pink:

We think that when we disclose our mistakes, when we follow that line of scripture and confess our sins to each other, we fear doing that because we think people will think less of us, when in fact, we have 30 years of science telling us that people generally think more of us for doing that. So that incantation toward the end of the New Testament is actually verified by a lot of recent science. So that's something that disclosure does. Now, the other thing that I think is even more important is this, that emotions by their very nature are abstract. They're blobby, they're amorphous.

Daniel Pink:

That's what makes positive emotions feel good, it's what makes negative emotions feel bad. So when we talk about our negative emotions, when we write about our negative emotions, particularly our most common negative emotion of regret, what do we do? We convert that blobby sensation into concrete words. Those concrete words are less fearsome, so we defang that regret. And the fact that it's concrete... I'm mixing metaphors here I know. The fact that it's concrete allows us to begin making sense of it. So that's an incredibly important part in drawing lessons from our regret. We have to disclose it, convert it from abstract to concrete, and make sense of it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What was the inductive process of figuring out? Because this was a new thought to me. I hadn't thought about disclosing your regrets. But as soon as I read it, first of all, I got the theological connection. And secondly, I'm like, "Wow! That just makes so much sense," for all the reasons that you say. How did you arrive at that?

Daniel Pink:

Well, I mean, I looked at the research, but I think my hunch came from the fact that... In this World Regret Survey I collected, we now have over 20,000 regrets from people all over the world. 20,000 regrets from people in 109 countries. So how did I do that? I had one mention in my newsletter and two tweets and all of a sudden I had thousands and thousands of regrets. That suggests that people want to talk about it. That suggests that people do want to confess to other people. And what people were confessing, nobody was confessing murder.

Daniel Pink:

They were confessing, "I really wish I had called my friend, but then unfortunately she passed away." "I really regret that I stayed in this lackluster job instead of going out on my own." "I really regret that I never asked that guy out on a date 20 years ago because I really liked him and I wonder if my life could



have been different." "I really regret not saving money and not being frugal." That's what they were saying because I think people want to talk about that. So I started thinking about why so many people want to disclose and you start looking at the research in disclosure and it makes perfect sense.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I want to go to the World Regret Survey, but one more question on the research, because what you said, I think, again, a lot of communicators listening to this, people who talk publicly, and there is at least in me still a fear, even though my head knows this is not true, there is a fear or a worry in me that if I disclose too much and talk about my weaknesses too much, exactly what you hinted at would happen, people would think less of me. But the research says just the opposite. Can you talk us through that research?

Daniel Pink:

You can go too far, there's no question. Okay, just to be fair, Carey, there's no question. You can go too far. You don't want to hear a laundry list of everything that I've done wrong in my life. But I think that if I... Again, this is going back to what institutions like religion or Alcoholics Anonymous do, they give us a process, they give us a set of steps, they give us a ritual. And those things are powerful. So if you're going up in front of people, don't tell them every bad thing that you did.

Daniel Pink:

My God! No, no one wants to hear that. But you can build affinity and gain credibility if you say something like... Let's say you're leading a team of people. Let me tell you about one regret that I have. You're honest about that. Let me tell you what lesson I learned from it and let me tell you what I'm going to do about it. That's good leadership.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yep. And that the science is people's respect for you goes up, not down as opposed to, "Hey, I'm the guy who doesn't make mistakes. I'm Bulletproof." Which is still a genre of leadership. Okay. Well, let's talk about the World Regret Survey. So you've hinted at how it got started, but you poured through... I think I've heard you say every single one of those regrets and-

Daniel Pink:

The first 15,000 at least. Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

First 15,000, so a little bit of homework after launch season is done. But that's unbelievable. Tell us more about what you learned about people's regrets.

Daniel Pink:

Well, what I learned in reading through these regrets is that if we're trying to figure out what people regret, what matters less are the domains of life in which the regret occurs. This is a career regret, this is a financial regret, this is an education regret, this is a romance regret, and something deeper underlying. What I found is that around the world, people seem to always have the same four regrets. They came up everywhere and we've talked about a few of them. But these four regrets were the ones that were coming up over and over and over and over and over again.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, you had four core regrets. And you divided them differently than other surveys. So you had done the research that Gallup and other organizations had done, and yeah, they do hit certain categories. But can you walk us through those four core regrets?

Daniel Pink:

Sure. Foundation regrets are, if only had done the work. These are regrets about people who make small decisions early that have bad consequences later. I spent too much and saved too little. I didn't take care of my health. Boldness regrets. If only I taken the chance. These are people who regret not traveling, not starting a business, not asking somebody out on a date, a lot of those. Moral regrets, if only I had done the right thing. We talked a little bit about this. People who regret bullying and cheating.

Daniel Pink:

Then finally, connection regrets, if only I had reached out. These are regrets about relationships, relationships that were intact or should have been intact that come apart usually in slow drifting ways. Somebody wants to reach out, they say, "It's going to be really awkward if I reach out and the other side's not going to care." So they don't reach out and it gets even worse. The four regrets are; if only I'd done the work, if only I'd taken the chance, if only I'd done the right thing, and if only I'd reached out.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, the stories are pretty powerful in the book. You can read the pain even in a paragraph when you looked at that, whether it was cheating on a spouse or a partner, or whether it was I wish I had studied harder because I really don't like my life or I'm in a financial mess right now. If only I had paid attention, if only I had stopped spending earlier. Yeah, what are some of the stories that really moved your heart as you read?

Daniel Pink:

Well, I mean, there's so many of them. I mean, most of them. So I have a woman who had a friend, a childhood friend. They grew up together, they were really good buddies. They go off to university, they grew apart a little bit, but not so much that they're... They're invited to each other's weddings and their families stay in touch. This one woman, Amy, she finds out her friend has pretty severe form of cancer and she says, "I need to reach out, but it's going to be really awkward because she's going to think I'm reaching out only because she's sick."

Daniel Pink:

So she waits and she says, "Okay, I really should reach out," and she says, "Oh, no, it's going to be really awkward. Besides, she's not going to care anyway." Eventually, she does reach out, and when she calls, she finds out that her friend had died that morning. So that's a big regret. So what does Amy do with that regret? Amy uses that spear of regret, that negative feeling and says, "I'm not going to do it this way anymore." So what she does is she... She has, unfortunately, another friend who has a serious illness. With this friend, she calls, she texts, she visits.

Daniel Pink:

That friend too sadly passed away, but Amy doesn't have regrets about that one. So I think it's an interesting example of both connection regrets, if only had reached out, and it's also a healthy way to

process regret. You don't ignore it, you don't wallow in it, you use it as a signal. It's telling me what I value, caring for my friends. It's instructed me on what to do, reach out. When you do that, you feel better and you actually reduce your subsequent regrets.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Another big finding in the research that really caught my attention was you had this graph and said, "When you're younger, you regret what you did, actions of commission, almost as much as things you didn't do. But as you get older, the sins of commission keep dropping, the regrets of commission keep dropping, and the omission rises a little bit." I thought that really resonated with my experience. Can you unpack that finding, Dan?

Daniel Pink:

I mean, you said it exactly right, that as we age, we are much more likely to have regrets of inaction, things we didn't do, than regrets of action. Now, why is that the case? I'm not sure, but I can guess. One reason is that regrets of action are easier to address. So if I have hurt somebody, I can apologize. If I've cheated somebody, maybe I can make restitution. You can also take some of the psychological sting out of regrets by doing a downward counterfactual, or what I call an at least. And I have these in the database of these now almost more than 20,000 regrets.

Daniel Pink:

People say, "Oh, I regret marrying that idiot, but at least I have these two great kids." You can find a silver lining in it. With inaction regrets, it's harder to find a silver lining and it's harder to... You can't undo something that hasn't been done. So they linger. They linger. What's more is that the two biggest categories of regret, boldness regrets, if only I had taken the chance, and connection regrets, if only I had reached out, those are almost... Not always, but heavily regrets of inaction. So that's what really sticks with us, what we didn't do.

Daniel Pink:

And I think what it suggests is that in general in life, not in every situation, in every realm, but in general in life, we should have a bias for action, because when we act, we learn, and when we act, we extinguish the what if questions?

Carey Nieuwhof:

So walk us through, you talk about optimizing regrets. How do you optimize your regrets these days? What are some of the tangible differences five years into this project that you would say are present in your life now?

Daniel Pink:

Yeah. Yeah. Well, when we optimize regrets, we have to think about... Anticipating our regrets is generally healthy, that if we anticipate our regrets and try to avoid them, that's useful. The problem is we have to do it right. So sometimes we over-anticipate our regrets and that can lead us to become risk averse. That's a bad idea. Other times we try to make sure that we minimize every single regret, we maximize on minimization. So what we know from a whole pile of research is that if you try to maximize every decision, you're going to be miserable.

Daniel Pink:

What should I have for lunch today? Well, I need to have the best hamburger in Washington, D.C. Oh, I have to have my roof fixed. I need the best roofer in the Washington metropolitan area, not the second best. People who maximize are generally miserable. The opposite of maximizing is what's called satisficing, which is just making a good enough decision. I think what the research tells us is that when we anticipate our regrets, we should maximize on decisions on these big four. So if you think about 10 years from now, I'm not going to care what color of car I bought last year.

Daniel Pink:

10 years from now, I'm not going to care what I had for dinner tonight or whether I wore this shirt today or another shirt. Who cared? I'm not going to care. But I am going to care, I can make a pretty safe bet of things that I will care about. I will care if there's a friend who I meant to reach out to and I didn't get around to it. That will still bug me. I will care if I do something morally wrong, I cheat somebody or I'm unkind. I will care if I have a chance to take a sensible risk and I chicken out. So what we should be doing is maximizing on foundation and boldness and morality and connection and satisficing, i.e., chilling out on everything else.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I have this little mantra I developed in the last decade when I'm stuck. It's like, five years from now, what will I wish I had done? I find that tremendously clarifying. Dan, anything else on regret for leaders that you want to share before we wrap up today?

Daniel Pink:

I mean, I think that the best thing that leaders can do is what we were... We were hinting at this earlier. I think one of the best things leaders can do is this week have a conversation about regret, and you initiate it. So tell somebody about one of your regrets, but don't just leave it there. Tell somebody about one of your regrets, tell them what you learned from it, and tell them what you're going to do about it. I think that could create a cascade of people normalizing this utterly normal regret and using it as an engine for getting better.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's really good advice, thinking about... regretting my 30s and the impact that my workaholism had on my kids. I feel like I've spent my 50s trying to redeem that and some of my 40s as well. And the good news is I have a great relationship, a deepening relationship with my now adult children that I think we all treasure, which is good. Dan, it's really, really powerful. Thank you so much. The book is called *The Power of Regret: How Looking Backward Moves Us Forward*. I would love for you if you would just to share where people can connect with you online these days on social or web.

Daniel Pink:

You can go to [danpink.com](http://danpink.com), [D-A-N-P-I-N-K.com](http://D-A-N-P-I-N-K.com). All kinds of stuff there, information about the books, a lot of free resources, videos, unicorn rides, free popcorn, everything you would want.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Dan, thank you so much.

Daniel Pink:

Pleasure. Thanks for having me, Carey.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, I'm glad we had this conversation. I do have regrets and I think I'll probably end up with a few more. I mean, this idea, "Oh, I never make mistakes. There's no regrets." I just don't buy that. Anyway, if you want more from the conversation and you want to see more of what we talked about or get a transcript of what we talked about, we've got those at the show notes. You can go to [careynieuwhof.com/episode499](http://careynieuwhof.com/episode499). Well, coming up, we've got, well, a few episodes I'm very excited about. We've got Tripp Crosby, Thom Rainer, Karyn Gordon, Seth Godin is coming back to the podcast.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Jeff Henderson, Stephen M.R. Covey, Jackie Hill Perry. Want to thank our partners. You can go and register for free to the preaching workshop I'm hosting later in June by going to [preachingworkshop.com](http://preachingworkshop.com). You can register for free. I will show you exactly how to preach more engaging, relevant, and memorable sermons.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Thanks to Pro MediaFire, submit your application for their Growth Program by going to [promediafire.com/growth](http://promediafire.com/growth). So I want to share some exciting news with you. Not only are we changing up the music on this podcast... I mean, that's not very exciting, right? Most of you're going to be like, "Oh, yeah, that's better. Anyway, where's the interview?" That's coming up next episode. But I want you to become the leader others need you to be. So very soon, in just a couple of weeks, we are launching a brand new podcast called The Art of Leadership Daily.

Carey Nieuwhof:

This show will be available Monday to Friday. It's a daily show. It features short clips from some of the best conversations I've had on this show with world-class leaders. I know, there's 500 episodes, right? You're like, "Well, sometimes I go back into the archive." Well, what if you could get a daily dose, very short, 10 minutes or less? We are going to go right back into the archive. You will hear little clips from Andy Stanley, Simon Sinek, Nona Jones, Patrick Lencioni, Annie F. Downs, Seth Godin, and everybody I've interviewed.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's hosted by Joe Terrell. Joe is the Content Manager on my team. He's an amazing thinker and I'm very excited to have him as the host. And here's what you do. Just wherever you're listening to this podcast, take a minute and just look for The Art of Leadership Daily. Do a quick search. You can search my name and it will show up and then subscribe. We launch that in the middle of June, so you got about a week to get in on it. We got a special contest happening over there too that you can find out once you listen to the preview trailer.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I'm very excited to bring that to you. But that's a way of repackaging some of what we've done on this show in daily bites that will help you become the leader other people need you to be. And we're talking about your family, we're talking about your team, talking about your church, talking about your

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business, all of those things. But a little daily bite from world-class leaders with me and Joe Terrell. Anyway, that is The Art of Leadership Daily with your host, Joe Terrell, and me. You can find that anywhere you get your podcast. Thank you so much for listening today 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.