

Announcer:

The Art of Leadership Network.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Well yes, you are in the right place. Hi, everybody. It's Carey and this is The Carey Nieuwhof Leadership Podcast, episode 500. And we got a brand new theme song. We have used the same music for 499 episodes and I thought, you know what? It's time for a change. Back in 2014, I think that was a great introduction but it's not 2014 anymore so some new music but the same show. And we're going to deliver to all of you as best we can, episode after episode, behind the scenes conversations with incredible leaders. And today is no exception. We've got Dr. Karyn Gordon. I'll tell you more about her in just a moment.

Carey Nieuwhof :

And today's episode is brought to you by Pro MediaFire. You can submit your application for their growth program, an invitation only cohort by going to promediafire.com/growth. And by Convoy of Hope. Things are still going on in the Ukraine that need our support and you can help the war victims there by going to convoyofhope.org/donate.

Carey Nieuwhof :

I want to start by just saying, thank you. Thank you to every single one of you who made the show what it is. We are blown away by the response that we've had and it's because of you that we're able to do this show week after week and bring you some fascinating guests. When I started this back in 2014, I thought, maybe I'll do a 100 episodes. I wasn't really thinking that far ahead. And in the back of my mind, I didn't even want to say it out loud. I thought, maybe I don't know, a million downloads and almost 23 million downloads later, here we are. And in fact, we just passed a month where we had 600,000 downloads in a single month. Incredible.

Carey Nieuwhof :

And that means more of you are sharing, more of you are jumping on and we want to bring you some incredible conversations, conversations about leadership, conversations about your health, your life and basically the person that you're becoming because our mission here is to help you thrive in life and leadership. I just want to say, thank you. It's been an incredible journey, far exceeded every expectation that I have but for the next, I don't know, several hundred episodes, here's the theme music we've got but the same show and we're going to keep trying to bring you the very best of what we can find in leadership.

Carey Nieuwhof :

My guest today is Dr. Karyn Gordon. We're going to talk about how to control anxiety in leadership, what insecure and arrogant leaders have in common and what makes for great leadership. She is a Wall Street Journal bestselling author, a TED Talk speaker and she is the founder and CEO of DK Leadership. She has got so many accolades. It's a long biography but she's been nominated several times for the RBC Canadian Women Entrepreneur Award. She has spoken live to more than half a million people in 17 countries, including a lot of Fortune 500 executives. And she specializes in working with CEOs of very large companies and often ends up at their homes, counseling them not only on how to lead their company but also how to lead their family. She has a doctorate in marriage and family and additional

certifications in leadership, emotional intelligent and career direction. She's been featured on Good Morning America, Forbes and Inc., Entrepreneur, the New York Times and in Canada on CityLine as well.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Are you looking for your next wave of growth online? Whether you're looking to increase engagement with 200 or 20,000 people, you should be aware of what hybrid tech can do for you in online growth. Our partner Pro MediaFire is working on hybrid tech with a select group of churches, nonprofits and businesses. The hybrid technology for online growth will increase your online engagement, it will maximize your large budget or your small budget and provide you with a steady stream of online and in person visitors. Plain and simple, it's powered by the strategy of humans but faster, much faster in driving growth than a physical team. If you're interested in this new technology, it's through their growth program, Pro MediaFire is opening up the special cohort for large organizations, in addition to small and midsize. Submit your application to promediafire.com/growth. If you want to get in on the growth program, go to promediafire.com/growth.

Carey Nieuwhof :

And our friends at Convoy of Hope are working all over the world, including in Ukraine to really help war victims. And if you're horrified by the headlines like I am, you probably want to do something. Convoy of Hope is a trusted partner. To date, Convoy of Hope has served over a 100,000 individuals in Ukraine and they're also actively distributing supplies in the eight countries of Ukraine, Romania, Poland, Moldova, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Hungary and Austria. They're everywhere. When you donate to Convoy of Hope, you provide basic needs like food, hygiene supplies, feminine supplies, baby supplies, medical supplies, blankets, bedding, clothing and so much more. If you want to help, and I hope you do, go to convoyofhope.org/donate. That's convoyofhope.org/donate. And now my conversation with Dr. Karyn Gordon.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Karyn, welcome to the podcast.

Karyn Gordon:

Thanks Carey. So excited to be with you.

Carey Nieuwhof :

We've been waiting on this one a while. Haven't we scheduled, rescheduled?

Karyn Gordon:

I think what is this? Number three the third time?

Carey Nieuwhof :

I think so. Travel, pandemic, illness, it all gets in the way. But here we are. And thanks for joining me in, well, I don't do a lot of these in my home studio but here we are.

Karyn Gordon:

Here we are.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Because you're a neighbor.

Karyn Gordon:

Because now we are a neighbor, which is just so awesome.

Carey Nieuwhof :

About an hour away.

Karyn Gordon:

An hour and away.

Carey Nieuwhof :

And hour an a bit. Which is awesome. I want to start at the beginning. Because as we got to know each other, you've talked a lot about your childhood. You have a great relationship with your mom and dad, which isn't always automatic and your dad was a pastor. And you're a PK who turned out okay. Which is really interesting. Talk about how your childhood shaped you?

Karyn Gordon:

I tell anybody who is from the pastoral kind of world, the church world, that I'm one of those rare cases that I actually loved being a pastor's kid. And that you don't hear that very often. And I think what made the difference, a couple things, my parents are salt of the earth kind of people and they have a very healthy spirituality. And I think one of the best things that they did is they really set very clear boundaries between, I remember my dad, he just as a pastor, when he would get hired by a church, one of the first things he would tell his board is, "My family is not hired for this job. I'm hired for the job." And he would make that very clear right from the very beginning. And so because of that, I remember being very small and him saying, "You're my daughter, you're my son." I'm one of three kids and he would say, "You're allowed to make mistakes. And the church might judge you but we're not going to."

Carey Nieuwhof :

Pretty awesome dad.

Karyn Gordon:

Pretty awesome dad. And so they had a very healthy spirituality. They also encouraged questions. They encouraged open dialogue. They knew about how to set boundaries between work and home. And so I think because of that, I was able to really kind of grow in my faith. In fact, okay so here, this is interesting, Carey, I didn't even know what a PK was. This is going to blow your mind, until I was 15. And I was at a camp and somebody heard that my dad was a pastor. They're like, "Oh, you're a PK." And I'm like, "What's a PK?" And because when my dad would get hired, he said, "My children are not allowed to be called PKs." I actually did not even know what a PK was until from another person when I was a teenager.

Karyn Gordon:

And you know what? It's very interesting because it's almost prepared me for the work that I do now because when I work with a lot of high performers, almost celebrity status, very high profile family leaders, I'm like, "You've got to take your kids off the pedestal. This is your role, not theirs." And so in many ways, this has actually really prepared me for the work that I do now.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Without telling tales out of school, did you or did you have a sibling who really pushed the boundaries to the point where your parents would be like, "Oh gosh, I wish we hadn't given them this much permission."

Karyn Gordon:

Of the three of us, I would probably be the one that pushed them the most. Not the other two. I'm the youngest of the three but I would probably be definitely the one that pushed them the most but they still had this just really solid, I keep kind of saying, the healthy spirituality, those healthy boundaries. Which it makes all the difference for children to know that they are loved no matter what.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Which is interesting because I think you come from a fairly conservative background theologically.

Karyn Gordon:

Yes. Fellowship Baptist.

Carey Nieuwhof :

That's a rare combination, in that circle.

Karyn Gordon:

Very rare.

Carey Nieuwhof :

It really is.

Karyn Gordon:

And not only fellowship baptist but it was really interesting, my dad was also one of the, his faith was very much around women in leadership. He was always really encouraging my mom actually to become a pastor within the Fellowship Baptist. And so I went to seminary, I think, you know that. When I was in seminary, he was kind of still planning, "Karyn, are you sure? Are you sure?" I'm like, "Dad, that's not my calling." And he was good with that. He was good with that. But I think he would've loved.

Carey Nieuwhof :

He would've loved to have seen you.

Karyn Gordon:

He would've loved for me to be a pastor, without question but I knew my calling was a little different.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Well, you kind of are. Just very different.

Karyn Gordon:

Very different.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Very different.

Karyn Gordon:

Very different.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Route. When you were 13, at age 13, you got a diagnosis where you were told, you'd be lucky to graduate high school. Went on not only go to seminary but to get your doctorate and to practice, et cetera, et cetera. What happened? And what happened to you when you heard that?

Karyn Gordon:

I talk about this in my TED Talk. This was also one of those incredible moments not only for me in my own leadership development, but also in where my parents come because whenever I coach any kind of leader, at work or home, it's so important in terms of there's so many incredible principles in this story. I was 13. I come from very academic family. My dad did his doctoral from Princeton. My grandmother was one of the first female doctors in Germany, in the 1940s and she lived with us. She was almost like a second mother to me. My brother and sister, straight A students, both highly gifted. Along I come as the third child, struggling in school. My parents could see how hard I was trying. I was disciplined but my marks were totally not reflective. And so the knew there was a massive gap so they sent me to this psychologist to get tested. And I'm in this room. I can still remember what the room looks like. I can still remember with where I was sitting. And I can still remember him pulling out, it's like it happened yesterday.

Karyn Gordon:

And he pulls it out and I remember he leans forward and he basically says, "We know what the problem is and you've got a learning disability and you're going to be lucky to finish high school." I remember just kind of sitting there and it's like my whole world just kind of exploded and I'm processing it. He might have been intellectually very bright, his EQ was extremely low. For him to tell any 13 year old that kind of message. And I just felt completely hopeless. And so afterwards, and my parents were really upset that we had entrusted a professional and how he told that news was devastating. Anyway, so I remember the car ride home was very quiet and then we got home and my dad said to me, this is where the whole kind of story starts in terms of his own, just healthy parenting.

Karyn Gordon:

He basically said, "Karyn, from this day forward, we will no longer ask to see your report card." And I'm like, "Well, what do you mean?" He said, "Because your report card is not reflective of your effort. And in this house we care about your efforts. We don't care about so much of the results." He said, "On the day of report card, we're going to have one question, which is, did you try your absolute best? Because

you can control that. You cannot control the outcome." And all of a sudden, Carey, as soon as he said that, I felt hope again because I can control my effort. I could not control the result. And so for any parent who has kids with anxiety and this is a huge piece of anxiety is when you get your kids to focus on things they cannot control, it's going to drive their anxiety. When you can get kids to focus on what they can control, which is their effort, it reduces their anxiety. Control and anxiety, they're connected.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Interesting.

Karyn Gordon:

When I coach as a professional counselor, one of the first things I get people to do is you separate what can you control versus what you can't control. And that's a huge piece to the puzzle with anxiety. There's a lot of variables to it but one of the huge pieces to it is so our entire culture, we focus on things we can't control instead of things we can control.

Carey Nieuwhof :

I got a 1,000 synapses connecting in my brain right now.

Karyn Gordon:

As soon as I was able to kind of realize, okay, I can control my effort. And so that was kind of the first step. That was in grade eight. That was kind of, so he said, "In our house, we're going to focus on your effort. You can control that. Therefore, that is what we are going to hold you accountable to. And we will literally not even ask to see your report card." And that was in grade eight. Grade nine, this is where kind of for anybody listening, who has a strong parented kid, pay attention because I am that strong spirited kid. If my parents had parented me differently, I would not have had the success that I had, without question. Because a strong spirit, you tell them to go right, they want to go left. You tell them to go up, they want to go down.

Carey Nieuwhof :

And that's your personality.

Karyn Gordon:

And that's my personality. You have to parent strong spirited children differently. And what you have to do with a strong spirited kid is you have to help them awaken their own sense of direction and then you partner with them. In grade nine, so after I have this diagnosis, my dad said, "Honey, you really should think about asking the school for a help." "No." "Well, we've got this diagnosis. I think it'd be really helpful if the school knew that you had this LD." "No, no, no. I'm not interested. I don't want to get any outside help." And this is as a parent, you have to walk beside your children because if they had said, "No, we're going to call the school." If they had kind of taken control and kind of taken away my own personal sense of control, I would've completely rebelled. A 100% I would've rebelled. But then my dad said to me, he goes, "Okay, this is your life, not our life." Your name's on that report card, not ours so we will respect your decision, Karyn, even though we highly disagree with it."

Carey Nieuwhof :

And you were 14.

Karyn Gordon:

And I was 14. I'm like, "Good." I felt like I won this. I felt like, okay, I won the debate. I'm in grade nine and then this is where part of, it's so funny in the TED Talk. I actually, when I rewatched the TED Talk, I actually thought they had cut out this part and it turns out I actually forgot to tell this part of the story in the TED Talk. The part that I forgot to tell in the story is that when I was in grade nine and I had my very first exam, it was English. And in that English exam, my very first exam, I got 37% on my very first exam in high school. And that was my wake up call when I was walking home and I'm so angry and I'm angry at God and I'm angry at my parents and I'm angry at this. I'm just filled with anger.

Karyn Gordon:

And then that is when I felt a very deep, deep, deep sense in terms of what I really, God was kind of speaking to me around, "You're focusing on the wrong thing. You're focusing on this instead of focusing on this, you can't control this. You can control this so what are you focusing on, Karyn?" And it was this very deep, deep connection where I realized I'm focusing on the wrong thing. I ran home and I sat down on my floor and I started focusing on things I can control. And that was my huge wake up. I'm 14 years old and that's when I literally put a little strategy in place for myself and the entire plan was focused on things I could control. And that's when I realized I need to go and get help. And that for me and for any leadership, when I think about leadership development, that is one of the foundational things is learning how to put your hand up and say, "I'm struggling here."

Karyn Gordon:

And once I was able to get help and put my hand up for help, all of a sudden the help was all around and I could actually start closing those gaps. And so I ended up graduating with honors but man did I have to work 10 times harder than anybody else but I was going for extra help after school. I had lots and lots of help with the teachers. The teachers love me because I'm like, "I want to do well. I'm not understanding this." I learned I'm a very high visual and kinesthetic student, which has helped me as a coach because I realize that I know how to engage a group. I know how I have to kind of speak and teach in different ways so I can really kind of get their full engagement. And so, so that's what helped me. Eventually I went to University of Waterloo, which was amazing.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Yeah, me too.

Karyn Gordon:

But I was working, I was studying four times harder than any of my friends at Waterloo without question because I would learn something and I just, I had to almost reteach it to myself. Now, I know what I need to do when I study something. But I understand for any child who has a learning disability, I know what that feels like and I know how alienated. Our system is designed for auditory students not visual and kinesthetic students.

Carey Nieuwhof :

That's the source of the learning disability, auditory?

Karyn Gordon:

That is part of it. It's called auditory. It's the way I process auditory. It's a special way. And I know how to but it's been a gift. Honestly, now I see my learning disabilities as this best gift. I wouldn't trade it for anything. I love it. I love it because now I know, I understand when I'm speaking to whether it's CEOs or teenagers, I know how you have to teach in a different way to try to get that level of engagement. And it's making sure you're teaching to all three learning types.

Carey Nieuwhof :

This is total amateur psychologist, so just throw this stuff out as I share it with you but I have heard a number of people say and you work with CEOs and top tier leaders every day. Whether that's experience or research you've got in your background, feel free to disagree. But it seems to me a disproportionate number of CEOs or senior leaders have some kind of learning disability, whether it's dyslexia. My oldest son has diagnosed me unofficially as ADD. He may be correct. I got 27% in grade 12 chemistry. I dropped math by the 10th grade because I just couldn't do it. And I got into university by the skin of my teeth. And then all of a sudden it's like, oh, this is fun. And it took off for me. And I spent 11 years there with the different degrees. But I'm wondering, do you see that as a profile of senior leaders that a lot struggle?

Karyn Gordon:

Absolutely. It's actually hilarious because when I draft anything in an email, I know how many lines I have to make it. Otherwise, if it's too long, they won't read it.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Oh yeah. That's my staff. My long time assistant Sarah, she would bold things, put it in yellow and you must read this in all caps and then she would ask me, "Did you read this?" I'm like, "Oh, I don't think I did."

Karyn Gordon:

You got five lines, everybody, you got five lines to try to capture the person's attention. It is. But they have their own genius of they have their own genius in this one area. And what's beautiful about all the CEOs I coach is that they just outsource. They know what they're really good at and they stay in that lane and everything else gets delegated to.

Carey Nieuwhof :

You know what? It's so funny, I have this memory and we're going to talk about the chairs, so maybe it's Carey, you've got serious work to do. But I have this memory of, I know exactly where I was. I was probably in sixth grade, so I'm 11, 12 years old and I'm not very good at math. And I remember someone saying, "Well, you better get good at math. You're going to need it." And I'm like, "You know what? I'm going to hire that out." What causes an 11 year old to think you're going to hire someone to do your math? Now, that's how it turned out. It's like, well, I'll get someone to run finance. We'll get someone. I understand a spreadsheet. I know what solvency is. But don't ask me to get there.

Carey Nieuwhof :

One of the theories and this is where this question was going, is that if, if we were all growing up now, we would all be medicated, treated whatever. And there's an argument I've heard that seems semi-persuasive to me that says, that might be a mistake. That sometimes that could be your genius. Look at

what happened when your dad said, "All right, this is your life. We strongly disagree." That moved the locus of control to you. I'm not asking you to say, "Never prescribe drugs," or anything like that. But what do you think about, how do your weaknesses become strengths? And do you have to be careful to keep those weaknesses sometimes near you? You know what I'm saying? It's a bad question but you can redeem it.

Karyn Gordon:

Yeah, for sure. When I started my counseling practice at 22 years old, I was at a medical center and this kind of came up a lot. And so when people, for example, had anxiety, depression, who is the first person they go to? They go see their family doctor. And there was 200 doctors in this building and there was word on the street, there's this new counselor that loves young people. And I love young people, my practice exploded. That's kind of where I started my career journey but I learned very quickly working these physicians, just the different philosophies around medication. And what I learned is that there are so many things that people can do. And we talk about the realm of control. There are so many things that people can do without medication.

Karyn Gordon:

There's no question, there's some people that need it. And I'm always very clear about that. There's a ton of people that don't need it but they need to focus on the right things. Things like, our mindset. I'm huge onto mindset. The power of the mind and the attitude that, in terms of the thoughts that we tell ourself. Learning how to master healthy thinking, learning how to master a really healthy schedule around sleep and nutrition and how that affects our ability in terms of how it affects our thinking but also our emotions. There's so many things that we can do on the education side and so what I loved with the doctors certainly that I worked with, their whole philosophy is, go see Karyn first, learn tools. And if that doesn't work, then come back and we will give you medication.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Long conversation.

Karyn Gordon:

It was a second resort, it wasn't a first resort. And I felt like that was a really healthy way of looking at this because otherwise it's very quick around everybody thinks that they have to get medicated. For sure, if I had gone, probably somebody would've put me on something but I didn't need it in my case. That doesn't mean that other people don't need it. I think you have to just make sure you get some really good feedback from doctors.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Interesting metaphor, second choice not first choice.

Karyn Gordon:

And that was from the family doctors. That was from the family doctors themselves. And it's again, we could have a whole conversation with lots of other family doctors but certainly the doctors I have really enjoyed working with and collaborating with, that has been their philosophy, is that focus first on what you can control, that locus of control. Really master that toolbox and then we're going to work on the physical things that you cannot control. And so it's kind of again, separating those two different things.

Carey Nieuwhof :

That's really interesting. Karyn, there are personality types and mine, if you look at the Enneagram, I'm an eight. Basically control, control, control, control. I have relatively low anxiety, I think compared to a lot of people, I know, a lot of other leaders. I just don't worry. Sometimes it makes people upset. It's like, you should worry. And if it's nuclear war, I'm probably going to worry a little bit. But it's just generally not a thing. How is anxiety related to locus of control?

Karyn Gordon:

It is I call them besties.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Wow.

Karyn Gordon:

Oh yeah, they're besties. There's certain things that are very interconnected. Anxiety is very connected to both perfectionism and also control, actually and also self esteem. I'd actually call them, they're four besties, all kind of hang out. And the reason is because with a lot of people with anxiety, so let me just back up. Right now what we're seeing and hearing is everyone's like, "I got anxiety, I got anxiety." Everyone's talking about anxiety. I work part-time at Cityline as their leadership relationship expert. I think you know that. And so we did the show on this. It was actually one of the most widely used.

Carey Nieuwhof :

TV show by the way.

Karyn Gordon:

TV show. Sorry, I should have.

Carey Nieuwhof :

For the American audience.

Karyn Gordon:

Sorry. Thank you. It's syndicated in the US, all across.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Oh, it is. Oh, I didn't know that.

Karyn Gordon:

Syndicated all across the US actually. But yes, it's a TV show that I do. I'm their leadership and relationship resident expert. And so we did a show on anxiety. It was one of the most well reviewed episodes because I explain what is anxiety. A lot of what I do is just education. It's just helping people understand these building blocks. And so anxiety is just an emotion, that's it. That's it. It's one word. And we've got thousands of them, Carey. Most people think we have about 50. Actually, I love it when I speak and I'll say, "How many feelings do we have?" And sometimes people will be like, 20 or three.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Three.

Karyn Gordon:

No, we've got thousands. We've got thousands. Feeling, that's all anxiety is, is a feeling, is how I feel. Anxious, happy, joyful, perplexed, tired, exhausted, excited. What was that? Eight? Nine? Feelings, you cannot control, thoughts you can. This is kind of a little psychoeducation, everybody. What it is, is our thoughts drive how we feel. Our feelings drive our behavior. Thoughts drive feelings, drive behavior. When people feel anxious, it's just how they feel. It's not good or bad. It's not right or wrong. It's not negative or positive. It's what we call neutral. It might be pleasant or unpleasant.

Karyn Gordon:

But anxiety is just a feeling and so when I coach clients, whether it's a Fortune 500 CEO or a teenager, it doesn't make any difference. I get them to pay attention, how are you feeling? But then let's kind of go back and connect. What's the thought that's driving it? Because for a lot of people, the thought is, what if? For anxiety, it's what if? What if I don't get this promotion? What if I don't have this amount of net worth? What if I don't get into this college? What if, what if, what if? Where's their focus? It's on the future, which they cannot control.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Wow. This is good.

Karyn Gordon:

That's the problem, not the anxiety. The anxiety is not the bad guy. In fact, your anxiety is your friend. I tell everybody, "Your anxiety is your friend." They're like, "But Karyn, it doesn't feel like my friend." I know it doesn't feel like your friend but it's trying to tell you something. You got to pause and you got to understand, what is the thought that's driving my anxiety? And then you've got to challenge your thought. You've got to really kind of be. And so that's why in leadership, it all comes down to really being very mindful on what are the thoughts that I tell myself? And are they empowering? Are they truthful? Or are they toxic? Because for a lot of people, their thoughts are toxic. That's the problem, not the anxiety.

Carey Nieuwhof :

This is fascinating because if you had asked me ahead of time, "Okay Carey, what comes first? The feeling or the thought?" I would say the feeling does.

Karyn Gordon:

And most people would think.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Really?

Karyn Gordon:

Yeah. And this is the kind of education we need to get into the schools.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Well and you're helping me connect the dots as to why I'm probably not an anxious person. Is when I get anxiety, and you want to make me anxious, show me something that's going down and to the left not up and to the right. If we're losing momentum, if we're losing this, that's when I freak out a little bit and then what do I do? I go right back into control. It's like, all right, let's diagnose the issue. Let's look at this. Let's get this fixed. All right, everybody on board? Starting now we're going to do this and let's see if it causes whatever. And then, I often because the news has been very concerning. It's like, okay, well what can I really do about it? Not much on this one, then I'm not going to think about it. I'm not going to play that Fox News, CNN tape over and over and over again in my head and try to get better sources. That is a recipe for anxiety?

Karyn Gordon:

No, that is what they call a solution to anxiety, which is so you recognize the anxiety. I'm feeling anxious because I think. The thought is what, Carey? The thought was, so you pay attention to the feeling. This is what everybody can do at home. You pay attention with what you feel. And by the way, feelings are only one word. That's one of the tricks of knowing what they're feeling. Because a lot of people can't even differentiate between what a thought and feeling is. Actually, here's a fun question. I know a little bit of side bar but let's come back. You let's say I just come to the US, I don't speak English and I hear the word thought and I hear the word feeling. How would you differentiate those two for me?

Carey Nieuwhof :

Oh, a thought is an intentionally. Again, English as a second language. Here we go. An intentionally formed idea or series of ideas that you consider. A feeling is often a subconscious mood that you experience. No?

Karyn Gordon:

Not bad. Not bad. Not bad. Let me help to differentiate because this is again, back to the education that we're talking about. This is, it all comes back to education is why I love this topic so much. Thoughts you can control, feelings you can't control. There you go. Feelings are one word, thoughts are generally a sentence. Let me give you an example. I feel as though you're not a good podcaster, is that a thought or a feeling?

Carey Nieuwhof :

That is a thought.

Karyn Gordon:

Correct. A lot of people get that one wrong. Why is it a thought? You're right because I said, "I feel as though."

Carey Nieuwhof :

Well you made an assessment, you made an independent judgment about my ability as a podcaster. That would be a thought.

Karyn Gordon:

Correct. And it's actually, and this is really important, I talk about this in my book. I have a little grid, a little chart for people to really kind of differentiate this because this is really important. It's actually really bad English and a lot of us talk this way, we throw the word feel in it and say, "Well..."

Carey Nieuwhof :

I feel like you're not listening to me.

Karyn Gordon:

Well, don't challenge me on that because that's how I feel. And then the other person's like, what do I do? And they feel kind of powerless.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Totally.

Karyn Gordon:

When we talk about communication, when we talk about great leadership and all great leads, you've got to really separate, what's a thought, what's the feeling? Because you can challenge thoughts, you do not challenge feelings.

Carey Nieuwhof :

A feeling might be, I feel unsafe.

Karyn Gordon:

I feel safe. And so the little secret with a feeling is feelings are one word, happy, sad, nervous, anxious, exhausted, perplexed. You validate the feeling, while you can challenge the thought.

Carey Nieuwhof :

That's really good. And you can do that for yourself. And that brings the locus of control back to you.

Karyn Gordon:

Correct. And so back to the anxiety, so one of the first things, so what you did, which was very cool is that you would understand, okay. I'm feeling anxious. You kind of go back to the thought, I feel anxious because I think what? I think we're losing momentum. The thought is, I think we're losing momentum therefore you feel anxious. What did you do? You created a plan based on that thought because that thought actually is probably truthful. That's real data. Then what you did is you created a plan based on that data and that's why plans are one of the best ways to actually reduce anxiety.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Oh, that's fantastic.

Karyn Gordon:

When we talk about change management in companies, I was just in Alabama this past week, working with a senior team on all the change that's going on. One of the best things as a leader you can do is pay attention, validate. I sense the anxiety, you pay attention, you validate it. Let's talk about the plan. Plan

to reduce anxiety. That's why control. Anxiety is the sense that I'm losing control for a lot of people and so you have to kind of focus on what they can control.

Carey Nieuwhof :

How did you end up here doing this? I'd love to go back a little bit. Because first of all, that was incredible. Secondly, it's not natural that somebody who struggled in school would number one, graduate high school but then go on to higher education and now train people in these things. Give us the thumbnail of the journey.

Karyn Gordon:

Thumbnail of the journey is in high school, I was debating with what to do. It was either interior design or psychology.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Very natural.

Karyn Gordon:

Really, it was a flip of a coin but I thought, I can do design for fun. I really wanted to help. That was kind of, that's where I started off at Waterloo University with my undergrad in psychology. And so eventually went to do my doctorate in marriage and family. And so when I graduated with my master's, I was 22 years old and which is really exciting. Then a family doctor asked me to set up a counseling practice within his medical center. I had no idea at the time, being a very early, first year entrepreneur of how huge that would be because I had these 200 doctors in the hometown just exploded. My practice exploded. Within two years, I was at full capacity.

Karyn Gordon:

And then I just fell, I love young people. Anybody who has teenagers, I love young people. They're curious, they got a lot of questions. Things have to make sense to them. And I just, I felt a real connection. I loved them. They loved me. It was a mutual thing. I was super young. From that, then I started writing books. I was encouraged to do television. One of my clients said, "You should get into TV." I thought, why not? When you have no fear of failure, it's kind of cool because if I fail. I've failed so much, this is a cool thing about having an LD. You fail a lot. There's a lot of things. You kind of get used to not fearing it. It's like, what's the worst thing that's going to happen? It's not going to happen. I thought, I'm going to produce a TV show. Literally got a TV show up and going when I was 24 years old.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Which one was that?

Karyn Gordon:

It was called Spill Your Guts. I managed to recruit, literally, I kind of go back. I can't believe I pulled this off but I got all the five big record labels in the country to agree to this music talk show and they would give me access to their celebrity musicians. And I would sit down with them and interview them about topics important to teenagers. We talked about goal setting and depression and anxiety and family relationships. And it was an amazing show. We sold it across Canada, the US and into Singapore. I was 25 years old.

Carey Nieuwhof :

And you're hosting this.

Karyn Gordon:

And I'm hosting this.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Spill Your Guts.

Karyn Gordon:

Spill Your Guts.

Carey Nieuwhof :

And who are you talking to?

Karyn Gordon:

I was talking to, the show was really focused on teenagers and parents.

Carey Nieuwhof :

But who are the celebrities that you're talking to who are spilling their guts?

Karyn Gordon:

Oh gosh, I actually had an opportunity to interview Britney Spears and I turned it down.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Oh man.

Karyn Gordon:

I turned it down because I had just run out of production money and we were producing it. I had a production company that I was partnered with. It was just an amazing journey to kind of sit down with these.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Yeah, no kidding.

Karyn Gordon:

With these very high profile musicians and just kind of hear them very, very raw in terms of just not your typical questions. It was a little bit of a MuchMusic MTV style. Anyway, so that's where it kind of started. And then, so I kind of focused on teenagers for the first kind of 10 years. And then by this time I was speaking across Canada and I had these amazing companies. Pepsi was one of my big sponsors, Pizza Pizza. And because I'd started developing these corporate relationships, I developed relationships with all these CEOs. That's kind of how I started.

Karyn Gordon:

And then, so what happened with the transition, with how it kind of ended into more the corporate culture was I started having these conversations with these CEOs going, "Karyn, you specialize with teenagers, right?" I said, "Yes." They're like, "Well, we're now hiring teenagers." A variety of CEOs that I was talking to were saying this, "And we don't know how to manage them. Could you take your doctoral training?" At this time I had my doctorate in family systems, in marriage and family. "Could you transfer that into the workplace?" I thought, it's interesting. And I thought, could I do that? Well, why not? "Why not, Carey?" I said to myself. Why not? Worst thing is going to happen is that it's not going to happen.

Karyn Gordon:

I thought, I'll transfer. That's what I did 15 years ago. And I found it, it was really easy actually. Now we work with companies all around the world. I think we're working with seven different countries, every single industry. I started focusing first on managing millennials because that was kind of my entry point. And what I realized is when I would work with these managers and I could understand why were some managers having a really tough time on engagement and retention? And why were millennials quitting? Because millennial, you have to manage millennials very differently. And so I realized that the secret sauce of really successful managers and great leaders was on emotional intelligence. And that's when I actually started kind of really kind of really going deep on, okay. I want to understand emotional intelligence. And when I realized that you can learn emotional intelligence, locus of control, and wow, you just have to have somebody really, really willing to do it. That's when I got very excited and that's when I just went really deep on the topic and so now that's what I do 80% of the time.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Let's talk about learning how not to fear failure. Because I talk to leaders all the time, they're terrified of failure. And I think this ties into your entrepreneurial streak, which I don't want to overlook. I want to talk about buying your first house. You've told me that story before and that's a fascinating story but how did someone who was told she was going to fail, overcome her fear of failure?

Karyn Gordon:

Well, I think the biggest thing is I failed. Again, this is more for everybody who's a parent, let your kids fail.

Carey Nieuwhof :

What does that mean?

Karyn Gordon:

You let them literally fail a test. You let them fail a course. You don't rescue them. You don't kind of try to go rescue them. Let them experience the cost of their failure. Assuming that this is not life threatening. The second you're in life threatening, then the rules change. But assuming, so you let your kids fail because this is part of parenting a strong spirited kid is that if my parents had rescued me from failing, I wouldn't have learned that lesson because when I failed, I realized two things. One, I need to learn how to ask for help because I was very stubborn. And so all of a sudden I saw the value of learning in asking for help, which is such a critical piece of leadership. And the other thing I realized is that I am not defined by my failure.

Karyn Gordon:

When I realize, okay, I fail. I have failed this test but that does not mean I am a failure. You separate your failure. The part of why so many people are afraid of failure is because their self worth is attached to it. You've got to separate it. It's like, and this is what my TED Talk is about is we have to separate our self worth from goals. It's like, this is something that I want but this doesn't define me. Goals, whether or not we get them, we don't get them, we're going to be disappointed or we're going to be excited but they don't define us. And so the failure is just, we've just got to start seeing as feedback and data. And again, that was where my parents really were very helpful when I was really able to experience that, really seeing my disability as this doesn't define who you are. This is just how you learn.

Karyn Gordon:

Learning how to separate those two things. And then what happens is when children really have that sense of security, that self worth is their self worth is solid. It's a solid foundation. That middle chair from my TED Talk, when you feel that, then all of a sudden you become more fearless. It's like, what's the worst thing that's going to happen? It's not going to happen. And so I learned that for me, what I didn't want to do is live my life in regret. I didn't want to be 80 years old saying, "I wish I had done A, B, C." I would rather experience failure than regret in my own brain. I kind of, I almost weighed the different value systems.

Carey Nieuwhof :

The other thing I want to chase down is you have become an entrepreneur, a real entrepreneur because a lot of clinical psychologists, they just kind of have their practice. They do what they do. They do their three decades or whatever and then they're done but you've been entrepreneurial. Where did that start? And how did that emerge?

Karyn Gordon:

It started when I was 12, when I was actually selling raspberries and strawberries door to door. My little wagon, I would go and pick them up fresh in the morning and then I'd put them on my little wagon. I went door to door and who's not going to buy fresh raspberries and strawberries of if a 12 year old girl comes to your front door. I would sell out really fast. That's when I realized, I just love the sense of that I could have an idea and I could kind of go make it happen. I think that's when it kind of got it started. And then I think I just knew that I wanted to have control over my schedule and what kind of work I do and who I kind of work with.

Karyn Gordon:

And so one of the things we have a career course, one of the things that we teach, one of our many courses and it's one of the actually exercises I get both teenagers and adults pivoting to do, which is identify your values with what you want in your career. And for me, I realize I wanted meaningful work, I wanted something artistic, definitely making a difference and having something about entrepreneurship. And so starting my counseling practice at 22 was a good start. And then just being open to new opportunities and seeing where the needs were. That was huge as an entrepreneur. And then, so I did that, being an entrepreneur for 25 years, just got nominated a second year as a nominee for Canadian Women's Entrepreneur Award, which is great. But the one thing that I got myself because all my training is in psychology and counseling was I got myself a really rockstar business mentor.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Oh really?

Karyn Gordon:

Oh yeah. And that was a game changer. That was a big game changer because I knew I needed business training and I needed somebody who understood business culture.

Carey Nieuwhof :

How did that happen?

Karyn Gordon:

That happened because I was hired, it was a very funny story. I was actually hired to go to this mentoring conference and I forget some television station hired me to interview the speakers at this mentoring conference and I'm backstage and I'm not really paying a very much attention but this woman went up on the stage and she says, she starts giving this very dramatic keynote. And she starts pointing to everybody in the audience. She's like, "You need a mentor, you need a mentor, you need a mentor." And then she's like, "Everybody think about it. Who's the first person you can think of that, who could be your mentor?" And I thought right away of this gentleman that I knew that I met in a marketing conference. And she's like, "I want everybody to go home, pick up the phone, not an email, pick up the phone and you ask that person."

Karyn Gordon:

I asked him, his name is Tony Chapman. And Tony was my mentor for a decade. And it was a game changer. Extremely well respected marketing guru here in Canada. And he was an exceptional and now it's kind of morphed into this beautiful friendship, but he is just, that was he taught me so much around business and marketing and just understanding kind of corporate needs and culture. That really, that's what kind of, when I was kind of starting to move in more of the business side and organizations, that's where the mentoring piece is huge.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Let's talk about your book, The Three Chairs. It just came out. Wall Street Journal bestseller, incredible and gave birth to a TED Talk, which we're going to talk about but what are for those of you who are watching, what are the three chairs? And it's such a simple but powerful illustration.

Karyn Gordon:

The three chairs are basically and I talk about this in the TED Talk for more information about it but basically it's the three different attitudes that we all have. It was a way for me to, and this is my learning disability actually at work because I was able to kind of, when I actually started working with young people and realizing that a lot of people struggle with self esteem, I basically started going into the weeds with the research and there's so much research that's out there but where the gap is, is simplifying the research for the average person and really making sure that it's practical.

Karyn Gordon:

And so when I realized the amount of research that was done on confidence and attitudes and how that affects literally every decision we can make, I thought, how do I take all this huge amount of information and boil it down to something that's very simple to understand? And that was my LD kind of at work.

And so this book really is very much, this is the gift of my learning disability because I realized it had to be visual. It had to be super simple and it had to be very practical.

Karyn Gordon:

And so there's three different chairs. And so maybe you can just hold up for a sec just so that I can kind of show everybody. The left chair is what I call the insecure person or basically the insecure attitude. This is the person that kind of puts themselves down. The right chair is what I call basically arrogant, the arrogant leader. They kind of put down everybody else. We all probably know somebody kind of like that. And then you've got the middle chair and the middle chair person is somebody who is very confident but the key difference between confident and arrogant is humility. This is the person in the middle chair saying, "I know a lot but I don't know everything and I'm going to put my hand up and ask for help." And so this is where we talk about the confidence and not only the confident, the attitude but when somebody has that attitude, how it literally impacts every single decision in their life from goal setting, to who they choose to marry, to their friendships, to in terms of perfectionism, it's all interconnected based on these three chairs.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Let's paint the profile because this is really interesting, so people can see themselves. The left chair, the right chair, the middle chair. Let's start with the left chair. What would you say, unconfident, insecure person?

Karyn Gordon:

This is imposter syndrome. This has nothing to do with age and by the way I do the youngest I've done this is five year olds. I've done this three chairs to kindergarten students and kindergarten children can see themselves very quickly when I kind of explain it and then I've done it to Fortune 500 CEOs because it's crazy in how it literally it's for every age group. And so I want everybody to think at home or wherever you're listening at work to think about which chair are you sitting in the majority of the time? The person in the left hand chair, they would be, they put themselves down. They have a very toxic mindset. I'm okay if I achieve. I'm only okay if I'm not enough. Their thought pattern is very tough, tough on themselves. They're very critical towards themselves.

Karyn Gordon:

The right chair, the arrogance, that's the person who is very tough on other people. They are very critical towards others. But what's interesting is that this is often the cover up for the right chair or the left chair. Do not be fooled when you see arrogance, it's usually a big cover up. It's like them just taking the mask off.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Well, I've read that narcissists are basically insecure.

Karyn Gordon:

Oh, it is. And I've worked with lots. I've been doing this for 25 years. It's amazing of how many people can seem so, so arrogant. They get in my office, the mask comes off and then you really see with what's going on. Do not be fooled when you see that kind of arrogance. And then the person in the middle chair is they have a sense of confidence of who they are. They know their self worth. It's not based on

achievement. It's like, I'm okay, period. End of story. And so because of that, they're more likely to take risks. They're more likely to set goals and go after them. They're more likely to ask for help. They're more likely to choose partners sitting in the middle chair. They have a better sense of setting boundaries for themselves. Once you kind of know where somebody sits, you can actually make very strong, educated guesses on how they make decisions.

Karyn Gordon:

I had people read the book and that they'll actually kind of get freaked out because they're like, okay. It's because the first couple chapters is all around understanding the chairs and then once, they're like, okay, I see myself sitting in the left chair and they start reading the book and it's like they're reading their life.

Carey Nieuwhof :

How does the person in the left chair, the insecure person make decisions?

Karyn Gordon:

Which topic do you want? About relationships?

Carey Nieuwhof :

Relationships.

Karyn Gordon:

The left chair is often attracted to what's your guess, Carey?

Carey Nieuwhof :

Probably similar people.

Karyn Gordon:

Correct. The left chair is often attracted also to the left chair or the right chair.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Wow. They want someone to dominate them.

Karyn Gordon:

because what unconsciously, what happens is we are unconsciously attracted all based on research to people who think the same way we do. Okay. Okay. So if I put myself down the middle chair, the middle chair person, what are they going to do? They're going to try to lift me up. Doesn't match my thinking. So I'm going to discount it. You're just saying that. You're just supposed to say that you're my mom. I'm my dad. You're my boss. Wow. So they will discount anything. That's positive. The, the right chair. They will put them down. So it matches their thinking and the right chair.

Carey Nieuwhof :

I think I'm worthless. Yes, you're worthless. Got it.

Karyn Gordon:

And so that's why these two are often attracted to each other for friendships, for marriage partners, for relationships and also business partners. I can think about hundreds of stories.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Wow.

Karyn Gordon:

All parents listening, just ask yourself, so this is when a lot of people are like, "Oh my goodness." When I do this in live conferences, Carey, it's crazy. People will literally blurt out crap. Oh my goodness. I can see myself. I can see.

Carey Nieuwhof :

I got a lot of relationships when I access this material going through my head.

Karyn Gordon:

I was speaking at a parenting conference in New York. This is several years ago. And after I finished about the three chairs, one of the moms she's like, "Where are you going?" I said, "Well, I've got to go back to Toronto." She goes, "Can I drive you? My limos downstairs, I want to take you for a drive in my limo because I got to pick your brain because this thing is blowing my mind." And in the limo, she starts sharing with me about how she saw her whole life flashed before her.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Wow.

Karyn Gordon:

She could kind of understand the decisions she made, why she was attracted to certain people. And this is what happens. When people see it, it's actually crazy. When I kind of teach it, I can watch the body language and people's eyes are just like, they can start seeing. That's just one topic. That's one.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Well, let's talk about the arrogant guy over here.

Karyn Gordon:

The arrogant guy is deeply for the most part or a female, because you can see those. For the most part it's a big coverup for this. You might have a boss who is sitting in that right chair. You might have a partner that's sitting in that right chair. And so for people who are learning to sit in the middle chair, learning how to relate to people in the right chair is a really interesting thing.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Well it's interesting because when I access the material in the book and in your TED Talk, I'm like, nobody wants to admit this but it's a coping mechanism. I'm probably in this chair naturally.

Karyn Gordon:

Oh, really? Really?

Carey Nieuwhof :

You don't think so?

Karyn Gordon:

No, I wouldn't have thought that.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Naturally. Naturally. I'm hopefully learning to sit in the middle chair. But I think that when I look back, because there was insecurity definitely that I had to work through. But it would usually come across as bravado. It would usually come across as control. You can't touch me. Or I'm differentiating myself. I've been talking about this with a friend over the last year. Really good friend who you would say, oh he sits in the middle chair but it's like, I look down on people more than I should.

Karyn Gordon:

Really?

Carey Nieuwhof :

Just being really honest.

Karyn Gordon:

I'm so surprised.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Here's the interior. What chair would you have imagined?

Karyn Gordon:

I would've for sure said this.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Middle chair. But nobody's born in the middle chair, are they?

Karyn Gordon:

Well, nobody's born any of the chairs.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Oh, okay.

Karyn Gordon:

Nobody's born any, we learn all of it.

Carey Nieuwhof :

I'm hoping I sit here but if I'm not in the middle, I gravitate here.

Karyn Gordon:

As a family, my husband and I were just talking about this. Because for Mother's Day, like all moms, my boys, I had them watch my TED Talk and we did the discussion questions. I'm like, "That's all I want. As a mom, that's all I want." And so we had this amazing conversation about exactly this point.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Wow.

Karyn Gordon:

Which was, I think what happens is well first of all, we all learn where to sit. But we also, under stress we tend to kind of go to one chair.

Carey Nieuwhof :

And I think that's it. If you push my buttons, I'm in this chair not that chair. Because I don't wallow in self pity. Well I do once in a while, give myself 10 minutes a year to wallow in self pity. But it would tend to be just a power up. Let's get through it, I'll boss some people around and feel better. Rather than I'm going to sit in the corner and cry. But hopefully I'm living most of my time.

Karyn Gordon:

In there.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Certainly as a result of my faith, in the middle chair. Which is your natural chair?

Karyn Gordon:

I definitely would've growing up and certainly with my LD was sitting there, for sure. And then it was my journey, my leadership journey is learning how to sit in the middle chair and by the way, nobody sits in any chair a 100% of the time.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Well, I was going to say, "That's why I don't want to say I'm so middle chair." That's my arrogance.

Karyn Gordon:

What I'd say is, "Which chair do you see yourself sitting in the majority of the time?" And I'd say 80%, if I think of somebody who is a healthy confidence, they would see themselves sitting here about 70 to 80% of the time.

Carey Nieuwhof :

I would say 70 to 80% of the time I'm probably in the middle. But push my buttons or lack of sleep or whatever, I'll end up in the arrogant chair.

Karyn Gordon:

And that's good reflection. And I think so under stress. That's the first question, where do you see yourself sitting the majority of the time? Start theme about how it affects your decision making, whether it's setting boundaries, relationships, goal setting, perfectionism, all of that. And then think about under stress. And one of the things, actually, one of my son's asked, which I thought was really interesting is does it play out with introvert/extrovert? Which I thought was a very interesting and I had to kind of process that because as an extrovert, extroverts are kind of they tend to lash out. Well, it's everything is external.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Correct.

Karyn Gordon:

I don't know, I haven't kind of figured out my theory about that. I thought that was a really, really strong.

Carey Nieuwhof :

That's a great question.

Karyn Gordon:

Isn't that a great question? But I think it is a good question for everybody to think about, which chair you see yourself sitting the majority of the time. And under stress, when you haven't taken good care of yourself, which chair do you tend to kind of fall into?

Carey Nieuwhof :

I answered the question based on natural or under stress. But I would say, I hope.

Karyn Gordon:

The majority of the time.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Most, the majority of the time I'm in the middle. Would you?

Karyn Gordon:

Yeah, totally. Oh yeah, for sure. And I absolutely, I would say that.

Carey Nieuwhof :

I'll take your clinical opinion. Thank you. I'm going to accept that one. But it's a huge journey, Karyn.

Karyn Gordon:

It's a huge journey.

Carey Nieuwhof :

This is years of therapy, years of prayer, years of self awareness, years of self regulation, years of learning have got me. And I was quiet. You said something, I think in your TED Talk, you said, because a

lot of people would say, "No, you're definitely not on the arrogant side." But sometimes that dialogue is inside my head. It doesn't come out but that counts, right?

Karyn Gordon:

Absolutely.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Because your self talk could be like, ah, whatever. Or your self talk could be, I'm a victim. I'm a victim.

Karyn Gordon:

And so even if you say it quietly, like I said, in my TED Talk, even if you say it quietly, it still kind of counts as that chair. And just remember everybody, that it's these are learned. We learn it from a variety of different sources. We learn it but we can change it. This is not genetic. You can learn how to sit in the middle chair. Everybody can learn it. I think this is where I really want to make sure the power and message of hope comes up very loud and clear because especially when we're talking about mental health, we're talking about all these heavy topics, people can learn, they can learn. I've done this for 25 years. I have never not been able to get a person in the middle chair.

Carey Nieuwhof :

And again, we're coming up on an hour.

Karyn Gordon:

Oh my goodness. Wow.

Carey Nieuwhof :

I know. I know. Didn't it fly?

Karyn Gordon:

Wow. It flew.

Carey Nieuwhof :

We'll have to go a round two.

Karyn Gordon:

We have to do round two.

Carey Nieuwhof :

We'll do a round two. I've gotten to two of my questions, so this is good. No, that's always a sign of good interview. Give us a couple of hacks if someone's like yeah, I'm the victim and I hate myself or if someone's like, I think I kind of am better than other people because their insecurity goes to bravado. Can call it that. What are some ways out of that other than 20 years of counseling, prayer, sweat, tears, mistakes and ooh, there's a healthier way to live.

Karyn Gordon:

The first thing is really dialing in around the mindset, is I am enough. I can't emphasize that enough because if people really just let it soak in, absorb it, think about it, meditate on it. Just really kind of understanding, I am enough, period. And just I've had clients where they've written it up on pieces of papers. They put it up on wall tattoos, they put it up on their computer screen. I am enough, period. Even the comments in right now with the TED Talk, people are like, "I'm enough, period. Thank you for this. I needed to hear this." That is the foundational piece because once we understand that and we meditate on it, then everything else starts falling into place.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Tie that into your Christian faith. Because that could be woo woo, new age stuff where, I'm enough. And then that whole idea that you wake up one night and you realize actually I'm not, this is a disaster. Because I think that is somehow theological.

Karyn Gordon:

Well it's I tell all my clients whether or not they're atheist, agnostic, Christian, Jewish, I've got clients with all spectrum. With all kinds of faith background, is all you have to do is think about with your children. Somebody who's really stuck on it, all I have to do is tell them, "Would you tell your kids I love you if you get an A?" And they're like, "No," "I love you, if you're size six?" "No." I said, "Truth is truth. It doesn't change." When you really start speaking truth to yourself, it's this universal value system, Carey. It's very powerful. When you really get people to pause and start thinking about that internal dialogue and getting people say, "Just think about what would you tell your child that you love?" I would say, "I love you, period." And sometimes so people that are stuck with this really toxic thought, you have to be, and this is what I do as a coach, I have to get them to step outside of that the themselves, because the dialogue is so loud and so strong, you have to get them to step outside.

Carey Nieuwhof :

That's a really good start. What are some other things? Because I agree. Daniel Goleman probably broke that ground in the 90s, emotional intelligence can be learned. What are some ways if you're the arrogant or insecure leader, the imposter, to move into that middle chair?

Karyn Gordon:

The middle chair, the middle chair mindset, the middle chair leader they have developed. Again, knowing that they can do it is really critical. Just having kind of that mindset. I talk about five course skills of that middle chair leader. Skills that they can actually focus on with what they can control, I call it the CARDS acronym. C stands for their communication, learning how to give honest and real feedback, A stands for their attitude and their goal setting. Goal setting is one of the best ways to learn how to sit in the middle chair because you're focusing on the locus of control.

Carey Nieuwhof :

That's why.

Karyn Gordon:

That's why. The thing about goal setting is you've got to be very careful because if the mindset is I'm going to get this goal and I'm okay if I get this goal, you're now putting yourself back in the left chair. The mindset has to be I'm okay, period. I want to get this goal because this is important to me, then you're

focusing on what you can control. That's a really critical piece about the attitude. That's the second, A stands for attitude, your attitude and your goal, setting skills. Relationship skills is your next category and that's your ability to focus on empathy and seeing life through a different lens. That's where generational differences, personality differences really kind of fall into play. And a great leader regardless of age, they really realize that how I see it is different than how you see it. That's a third skillset.

Karyn Gordon:

The fourth skillset is decision making is self discipline. This is really interesting. Self discipline is very correlated to sitting in the middle chair and it's also very correlated with happiness. There's tons of research down about incredible actually. I don't know anyone, Carey, who is sitting in the middle chair, who has not mastered a very healthy dose of self discipline.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Fascinating.

Karyn Gordon:

Isn't that interesting?

Carey Nieuwhof :

Yeah, it is, it really is.

Karyn Gordon:

Self discipline, which is really huge because when I started working with millennials, one of the biggest things that I started seeing is just this whole, we're living in a whole culture. This is all of us around instant gratification. Self discipline is a cornerstone of learning how to sit in that middle chair. And the fifth category, is for stress and emotion management, so that the leader who sits in the middle chair is learning how to set boundaries. It's learning how to say no, it's learning how to really take care of themselves in all parts of their life. And so learning how to sit in that middle chair is learning how to develop all five of those core. And these are skills that all of us can learn.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Threading this back to where we started, anxiety. Most prevalent in the imposter chair, the arrogant chair and how does it go in the middle chair?

Karyn Gordon:

Anxiety is very strong on the left and the right chair.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Both.

Karyn Gordon:

Both.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Okay, both.

Karyn Gordon:

But it looks different. But it looks different. On the left chair, the person is like, they're putting themselves down because the anxiety, so they're just going to get themselves all kind of tied up. Where I see it in the right chair is they tend to lash out at everybody else. Because of that anxiety, it comes out as aggression towards other people.

Carey Nieuwhof :

That's unhealthy me or old me.

Karyn Gordon:

That's really critical. But the person in the middle chair is getting them to focus, getting themselves, their family, their team at the office, let's focus on what we can control. And accept whatever our best is. We're going to strive for excellence, not perfection. You can't erase, this is the other thing about our brain. You can't erase thoughts, you have to replace your thought. Instead of saying to yourself, "I can't, I got to stop. I can't be a perfectionist. I can't be." That's not going to go. You have to, your brain is so sophisticated, you have to, and I do this with all my, when as an executive coach, when I'm coaching clients, you have to replace whatever that toxic thought is with something that is so truthful and so powerful. And that's how you do it. And so you have to replace, you can't erase perfection, you've got to replace it with, I will strive for excellence not perfection.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Not erase, replace. So good. Let's talk TED Talk. You just delivered one. It's out. It's getting a lot of traction online. What was the process like?

Karyn Gordon:

Intense.

Carey Nieuwhof :

I know. We got to walk through it a little bit.

Karyn Gordon:

It's intense. My book came out and then within a month I got requested do the TED Talk, which was really exciting. I've always wanted to do one. But just had never prioritized it. It was perfect timing but it was awesome. I really see what I do as I'm a teacher, I'm really an educator. I love to take a lot of data and simplify and make it so that people can understand it and make it practical. And so where the book is different than the TED Talk, the book is a business book. It's for leaders in developing leaders.

Karyn Gordon:

The TED Talk, I intentionally widened the audience so that parents could watch it with their children. Managers could watch it with their team and teachers could watch it with their classroom. We have free discussion questions for all three groups so that you can watch it together and then have a discussion

because it's in the reflection that's so powerful. And so it was an amazing process to go through it. For anybody who's done a TED Talk, you know what I'm talking about. You get assigned coaches and people. You do tons of rehearsals. The biggest challenge for me was getting it down to 17 minutes. This is an hour.

Carey Nieuwhof :

I know. I know and it's your life's work.

Karyn Gordon:

But it's my life's work. It's my life's work. And I'm just, my hope was that people would watch it, it made sense and they would feel hopeful. That's what I wanted. I wanted because we're just living in a culture that feels like there's no hope. It's like, I've got anxiety. I have no hope. I've got a mental illness. I've got no hope. I've got bad parents or bad. I wanted people watching, going, okay, this is a message of hope. And I'm thrilled it's just getting such good traction and that people are sharing it and they're watching in their classroom and their team. And, CEOs are sitting down in their living room, watching it with their teenagers. And that was my goal. So that you can have that honest conversation. Everybody watching, watch it with your family, have that honest conversation, that this is a process. This is a journey. Don't give this sense that, some of you've got it all figured out. Having that kind of honesty, I think is just so powerful.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Well, this has been an incredible, I think round one. We'll have to have you back, Karyn. It's been great. Also, your husband and boys are in the backyard along with your dogs and everyone's hungry.

Karyn Gordon:

Well, full service.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Full service.

Karyn Gordon:

We get a barbecue after this podcast.

Carey Nieuwhof :

You get barbecue after this. And we made everybody hungry for it while we did this interview. But I want to thank you so much. I think you probably opened up the minds and hearts of a lot of leaders today. Love the angle on anxiety. The book is called The Three Chairs: How Great Leaders Drive Communications Performance and Engagement. And your TED Talk, just the title.

Karyn Gordon:

Why Confidence Is The Secret To Great Leaders At Work And At Home.

Carey Nieuwhof :

That's it. And so you can find that, it's Dr. Karyn Gordon, Karyn with a Y. Just search that on ted.com and you'll find it. It'll pop up. Karyn, if people want to learn more, what's a website where they can find you online?

Karyn Gordon:

The best is to go to our main one, which is DK, DK stands for Dr. Karyn, leadership.org, O-R-G.

Carey Nieuwhof :

dkleadership.org. Karyn, thank you so much.

Karyn Gordon:

Thanks, Carey.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Well, that was a fascinating conversation. One of those that went on and I'm like, wow, I felt like we just barely scratched the surface. I'll probably have Karyn Gordon back at some point in the future. Thanks so much, Karyn. We have show notes for you. You can head on over to careynieuwhof.com/episode500. And next episode, I'm so excited. Seth Godin returns and I get his take on everything from the Beatles, to why he has no staff, to why he never listens to the news and the future of the planet and a lot more. Here's an excerpt.

Seth Godin:

Paul, Paul is the reason for the documentary because Paul needs that. He needs that audience, that deadline and most of all, he needs to make John smile. That he is there showing up, doing his riffs, not for the fans. He wrote the fans off years ago. He has no patience for screaming, 12 year old girls. That becomes clear throughout the whole thing. He is there to put on this little show in the service of the big show. And John, John mostly brings in his stuff pre-workshopped and John needs to seem like he's above all of it. And what I take away from it as a creative and as someone who talks to creatives is you should figure out who you are.

Carey Nieuwhof :

That's next time on the podcast. Thank you so much to our partners, Pro MediaFire. You can submit your application for their growth program. It's an invitation only cohort by going to promediafire.com/growth. And by Convoy of Hope, you can help the war victims in Ukraine by going to convoyofhope.org/donate.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Also coming up on future episodes, we have Vanessa Van Edwards, Terry Crews, who else have we got? We got Patrick Lencioni coming back, which I'm so excited about. Nona Jones, Stephen M.R. Covey, Dion Nicholas, Andy Crouch and so much more. I also, before we go, want to share some really exciting news with you. I want to help you become the leader other people need you to be right. Your family needs a certain level of leadership from you. Your team does definitely and this week we launched a brand new podcast called The Art Of Leadership Daily.

Carey Nieuwhof :

This transcript was exported on Jun 08, 2022 - view latest version [here](#).

This show's available Monday through Friday and here's what we're doing on that show. We're taking short clips from the archive of this show, which is now 500 episodes long and they're long form podcast, taking short clips from our archive and featuring some of the best conversations I've had with world class leaders. Some of the voices you're going to hear on The Art Of Leadership Daily include Andy Stanley, Simon Sinek, Nona Jones, Pat Lencioni, Annie F. Downs and the list, well, it's about 500 guests long.

Carey Nieuwhof :

It's hosted by Joe Terell. Joe is the Content Manager for my team. He's a young leader. He does an incredible job. And in 10 minutes or less, he just takes a snippet of one of our shows from here and shares it with you. Think of it as your daily leadership dose. And as you know, I hear from you all the time. A lot of you are going back into the archives going, "I just discovered episode 323. It's amazing." We're going to bring you short little doses every single day and we're giving away an incredible prize to four winners. All you have to do is text the word daily, D-A-I-L-Y to (833) 777-8558. You'll receive instructions on how to win a \$250 Amazon gift card plus a membership to my new Art Of Leadership Academy. We're choosing four winners the week of June 20th so make sure to enter now.

Carey Nieuwhof :

And if you want that again, here's the easiest thing you can do. Just head on over to The Art Of Leadership Podcast, the daily podcast, you can find that anywhere podcasts are subscribed and I've got an episode showing you exactly how to enter to win. And then you can listen to that just a short little bit while you brush your teeth or you're in the car on the way to work or whatever you happen to be doing 10 minutes or so a day Monday to Friday, The Art Of Leadership Daily. And I hope you're one of the winners there too.

Carey Nieuwhof :

Thank you so much for listening. Let us know on the socials what you think of the new format and or send me a note, carey@careynieuwhof.com. Really appreciate you. We couldn't do this and wouldn't do this without you and it's a joy to be able to do this well, indefinitely into the future. Thanks so much for listening and I hope our time together today has helped you thrive in life and leadership.