

Carey Nieuwhof:

Hey, podcast listeners, just a quick word before today's show. How are you doing when it comes to leading change? You know that the world is changing faster than ever, and here's what I really believe. It's a situation where you either disrupt yourself or you get disrupted, but you know what? A lot of leaders I talk to, church leaders, business leaders, have a really hard time leading change. They're worried about pushback, the opposition, et cetera. Well, I have a complete step-by-step framework that will help you lead change and navigate the opposition, the pushback and the confusion that you experience way too often when you lead change. I've got a brand new course called The Art of Leading Change. It's your solution to make the right changes and implement them successfully even when it feels like everything's against you. You can enroll before August 31st to secure the best pricing. Here's what you need to do. Go to theartofleadingchange.com. All of my best content is in my courses. Go to theartofleadingchange.com. And now onto today's episode.

Announcer:

The Art of Leadership Network.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Welcome to The Carey Nieuwhof Leadership Podcast. It's Carey here. So excited to bring you my friend, Jeff Henderson, back for episode 517. For all of you who are brand new, we get new listeners every month, every episode, welcome. Really glad you're here. For those of you who've been here from the beginning, man, I love you. Thanks so much for showing up again. I think you're really going to appreciate this. We are in the midst of the Great Resignation. Some of you are still thinking about making a move, some of you have made a move, some of you are excited with it, some of you are regretting it, and Jeff Henderson steps in. He's the author of a brand new book called What to Do Next and... Well, I'll tell you more about Jeff in a moment.

Today's episode is brought to you by Compassion International. You can equip local churches around the world while seeing your church grow in the process by going to compassion.com/church and by Overflow. Overflow is an online software that empowers donors to seamlessly give crypto and stock donations to churches and nonprofits within minutes. Go to overflow.co/carey, that's .co not .com, /carey to learn more. Jeff Henderson is back and he has worked with some incredible organizations, the Atlanta Braves, Callaway Gardens, Chick-fil-A, North Point Ministries and Maxwell Leadership. He's back with a brand new book called What to Do Next and we talk about his transition from pastoring local churches into what he does today at The FOR Company. He has been named by Forbes as one of the 20 speakers you shouldn't miss and he is trusted by businesses and by churches alike.

His bestselling book, which he's talked about here on the podcast, Know What You're FOR, launched a movement literally around the world empowering leaders to grow both purpose and profit. We're going to talk about transition so if you're a young leader, this is fantastic career advice. If you are a leader... Jeff and I are, I think, two weeks apart in age, born the same year, same month, just a couple weeks apart so we track a lot about this. If you're a leader in your fifties like Jeff and I, I think you're going to find this really, really helpful as well. We're going to talk about how to know when it's time to leave, how to finish well and overcoming career indecision. It's pretty fascinating. I am excited you're here for this. We also have show notes for you and you can watch it on YouTube as well, but for those of you who are listening on the audio version we are so glad that you're here.

I want to tell you about a ministry that I have loved for years, and that's Compassion International. Compassion is an incredible organization and their goal pretty powerful, to release

children from poverty in Jesus' name. They currently serve over two million children and their families in some of the most poverty-stricken areas of the world and, my favorite part, all of this is happening through the local church. Compassion is all about equipping the local church. I've seen this on the ground. It's powerful. Every single child is cared for by leaders in their community, not by people from outside of their country. As a pastor, I found Compassion to be a strategic part of our global mission strategy when I was leading Connexus Church and we actually incorporated them as a partner into our focus on Guatemala, a country very close to my heart. Compassion made it easy for everyone in our church to put their faith in action by caring for a child in need.

You can help equip local churches around the world while seeing your church grow in the process by visiting compassion.com/church to learn how. That's compassion.com/church. They would love to talk to you about how to make that happen. Now, also if you're a church leader, let's face it, church fundraising is hard, especially in this wobbly economy, but did you know that 90% of US households' wealth is tied up in non-cash assets? That's right. People are cash poor, asset rich and that means churches only accepting cash donations are missing massive giving opportunities. Overflow is here to help. Overflow is an online software that empowers donors to seamlessly give stock donations and even crypto to churches and nonprofits within minutes.

The average donation to churches and nonprofits is \$128 but the average donation through Overflow is, are you ready, \$9500. Yeah, \$128 via cash, \$9500 versus stock or crypto. Your donors want to give stock and crypto because it's the most tax-efficient way to give. Why? Because there's no capital gains tax so churches get the full donation, donors get the full deduction. As a result, churches have seen up to 32x return on their investment with Overflow so if you're ready to unlock unprecedented generosity, go to overflow.co/carey. That's overflow.co, not [.com](https://overflow.com), [.co/carey](https://overflow.co/carey), my name, to sign up. [Overflow.co/carey](https://overflow.co/carey). It is a fascinating, fascinating model. Anyway, hey, let us get into today's conversation with my really good friend, Jeff Henderson. Oh, Jeff Henderson. Welcome back to the podcast. It's good to be with you.

Jeff Henderson:

Carey, good to see you, buddy. Always good to be with you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. You made a big transition over the last few years, as have a lot of people listening to this. Statistically probably half of these listeners have made some kind of big move in the last few years. What was the hardest part of the transition? Tell us what the transition was and then the hardest part of the transition for you personally.

Jeff Henderson:

It's interesting. I think over the last 23 years I've made three big transitions, leaving Chick-fil-A marketing to join Buckhead Church in the early days and leaving Buckhead to launch a couple of Gwinnett Church locations and then this latest one. There were some similarities because I loved what I did, I loved the people that was there but there was something in the future that I was intrigued by. In some ways, what I was intrigued about in the future kind of ruined what was in the present. I don't like the word ruin, but in essence it was like, "Oh yeah, I'm so intrigued by this." For example, when I was at Chick-fil-A I thought, "Okay, video church..." Because this was back in the day when video church was kind of an unheard thing. "If we could figure this out, this could be a really huge thing for the kingdom in terms of other churches and other communities doing this." I was so intrigued by that, Carey, that I thought, "Oh no, I think I have to leave Chick-fil-A to go pursue this." In this season I've-

Carey Nieuwhof:

That was about 20 years ago, right, early 2000s when you left Chick-fil-A?

Jeff Henderson:

Right. Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Jeff Henderson:

Absolutely, yeah. 2003. In this season, I've been traveling around talking about, "Hey, what do you want to be known for? It's no longer about being the best company in the world but it's about being the best company for the world." All this also related to the church. I began to sense, "Oddly, I think this is my next season." But I was so grateful in the sense that there's some grief associated with that because that meant that you were leaving people and organizations that you loved, and I would rather have it that way versus, "I'm out of here, that kind of a thing." But I'll say this, you were a model to follow because you did the exact same thing. I kid you but it's actually true. I think you're three to four, five years ahead of me in all your decisions. If it's okay to flip this, because I've actually interviewed you on your podcast before...

Carey Nieuwhof:

Mm-hmm.

Jeff Henderson:

Talk about Connexus and when you... One of the best leadership transitions I've ever seen, not just church but the whole organization, the way you and Jeff Brodie handled that and the elders, but what were you sensing when you left Connexus?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, it'd be interesting to compare notes because we are in the Great Resignation. 42% of pastors in 2022 are seriously thinking about leaving. I did my transition back in 2015, so the not short answer to the question is even as a young adult I realized a lot of leaders stay too soon. I thought I had one church in me when I was called to Oro, which is north of Toronto, and that's basically the church we're still a part of, I'm just founding pastor now which means I don't do anything and have no significance. That's just like you started something years ago, that's it. But I kind of knew as a young leader that if you stay too long it's a problem, and then as my leadership developed I'm like, "Oh, succession is a massive issue, particularly for founders." I always had that in the back of my mind, and then there were a couple of factors that came together. One was, "Who is going to take this over?" Because it grew to be one of the larger churches in our country, and not the largest by any stretch but we had over a thousand attenders and 3 or 4000 people who called Connexus home. In the Canadian context, that's a very large church.

Jeff Henderson:

Huge.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. I just was at the point where I was trying to figure out, "Okay, who could do this?" I had someone I had hired a few years earlier to do student ministry that I then challenged to become our executive director of sort of administration, gave Jeff Brodie the building project when we were building our broadcast location. I did the vision casting and the fundraising and the big stuff but I said, "You're logistics." I thought, "You know, I'm going to see how he does." Around that time I had found that I was motivated by big goals and so my day-to-day enthusiasm for meetings and administration was declining, the stuff that used to energize me didn't energize me and the only thing I was really enjoying anymore as I was getting into my late forties... I was still enjoying teaching, I was enjoying vision casting and I was enjoying the super high level leadership decisions. I'm like, "Yeah, but this church needs more." Jeff was a decade... Is, I guess that doesn't change, a decade younger than me. You and I are a week apart. We always text each other on our birthdays.

Jeff Henderson:

That's right. March birthdays.

Carey Nieuwhof:

The same year, same month, the whole deal. March birthdays. Anyway, Brodie was a decade younger than me. That's when we... When we opened the broadcast location, we went almost immediately into succession conversations and six months after we opened our broadcast location I took a demotion to teaching pastor and founding pastor. I taught for four years, kept a full-time teaching load, scaled back to halftime in 2020 and then really I'm not on the teaching team or doing anything significant at the church anymore. Jeff's doing a great job. That was the reason, though, was concerned about succession, worried about what I saw inside myself, the boredom with the job and the lack of interest, and then there was this whole leadership sphere that I wanted to pursue more. How about you?

Jeff Henderson:

Right. In the middle of all that, there's two things that are really helpful to point out. I think one of the reasons sometimes leaders hold on too long is because they're holding onto security. The older that you get, the more security I need to have a paycheck, which totally makes sense. There's security and they're also holding onto that identity. I am the... When I go to a party and somebody asks me what I do, I've got a really clear answer, "I'm the pastor of this or I'm the owner of this." When you make a transition, the older that you get, the more the security and identity get rocked. But you and I know leaders who've held onto security and identity for so long that their effectiveness has waned in that organization. I didn't want that to be me and you didn't want that to be you.

There's an old adage. When someone asks Clint Eastwood, "Why do you keep making movies in your eighties?" And he says, "Because I don't want the old man to win." One of the ways that you don't let the old person win is you've got to be really openhanded with your identity. I mean, we know clearly there's values and faith-based, all that kind of stuff, those are your identities that are unquestioned, but the identity in terms of what you do, you got to hold on loosely to that. Then security, if you're holding onto security but you're like, "You know what? But I think I could go do that and it's going to rock my identity and security." In the three moves I've had over the last 23 years, both security and identity have been rocked each and every time but it's so helpful being on the other side of that because it's reminded me, "Hey, don't get so caught up in an identity of what you do because there's the old identity, 'If you are what you do, you're not when you no longer do that.'"

You got to be really careful with that. This season was another opportunity for me to kind of let go of... This is the first time in my life, Carey, that I haven't gotten paid every two weeks. It's like I'm

working for a company and I get a paycheck every two weeks, now it's... You're in a similar situation. You're trying to build recurring revenue, you're out speaking and writing and all this and so you're trying to figure all that out. But it's this new season, and it's been uncomfortable but discomfort is the price for growth.

Carey Nieuwhof:

This is really interesting because I'm glad you raised that, security and identity. Let's talk about security because I've studied succession enough and know enough people who actually do succession for a living, like help churches and church leaders with succession for a living, to know that the financial piece is important. I look at my career and I think I've had a great career of downward mobility. I left law... When you left Chick-fil-A, I'm taking it wasn't for a pay raise. Is that accurate?

Jeff Henderson:

Yeah. Downward mobility would be... Agree. Plunging downward mobility, yes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Plunging downward mobility, so it was a significant pay cut. I mean, I had an opportunity to make literally 2x the money in law in Toronto starting out, and that was the base salary, and then came up to an hour north of Toronto and started working for a lot less. God took care of us. Then when we started Connexus and left a denomination, I had to give up a pension plan and that was challenging. Then seven years ago, I took a 20% pay cut because the elders wanted to honor me and I'm like, "You know what? Jeff needs to be paid better than me. I know what our budget is. Just give me a pay cut. Pay me the next level down in the church." But I was putting two sons through university at the time, college, and engineering and accounting, not cheap degrees.

For my wife, Toni, and I, it was a real question about, "Okay, where is this money going to come from, the gap, the 20% pay cut I was taking from my old job?" You know what? We didn't know but it resolved itself so quickly and it was just like whatever gap there was, God somehow filled it in. I don't really know, and then I moved into a few years ago just totally. It's this company that was really a hobby 10 years ago that has now become a thing that employs eight of us and et cetera, et cetera and is able to reach millions of leaders around the world, but I didn't know that ahead of time. Talk about... Because I think knowing you as I have over the years, security's important to you. You're not by... You are a risk taker but you're not a gambler, do you know what I mean? Does that make sense?

Jeff Henderson:

Absolutely. Let me back up, what you just described is so helpful in terms of your decision making process because you had to figure out, "Okay. What am I doing financially?" But I remember it wasn't too long ago when you called me and said, "Hey, think I want to launch a podcast and would you be one of the first guests on this?" Who knew that... I mean, I love you and you're one of my best friends, but I don't think you had any idea that it would be this gigantic, right? But what you were doing-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Not even close.

Jeff Henderson:

Right. It was what I call in the book a side hustle like, "Hey, I'm going to kind of go over here and launch a podcast and here's... I'm going to experiment with this." You didn't know that you'd have all these millions of downloads and all this kind of stuff. That's what people look at, stories like you like, "Oh, well, I wish I could launch a podcast and instantly have millions of downloads." You didn't instantly have millions of downloads. It happened quicker than you thought and it's bigger than you thought but that's kind of the deal with these side hustles that you're experimenting out there. One of the things I do right now is I coach business executives on how to make their next presentation their best presentation. Well, part of that was a side hustle I did years ago with Preaching Rocket. When I launched an online preaching coaching program for pastors, well, I didn't know that 12 or so many years later that would be a core component of this new season of mine.

These side hustles are really, really important to help you bridge what I call from now to next. I think that's really, really, really important, but I think being open and honest with is this season... Has this season come to an end? I had a personal advisory board, many of whom you know, who spoke into this and said, "Hey, we think this season is coming to an end for you because you're an empty nester." I felt like, and some others felt like, "Hey, I wonder if a lead pastor needs to have, at least in a multi-site church, that campus pastor needs to have some kids in family ministry." And we didn't anymore so as a result of that, maybe this season is coming into an end. We've got all these things swirling, but one of the most important things for me is Wendy and I were on the same page going, "Let's let's see where this thing's going." Then I had some advisors speaking into it as well.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Mm-hmm. I remember processing that with you. You were very gracious with your time and you and I talked all the time when you were considering a move and everything, but let's go back to the financial piece for a minute, Jeff, because it's not like you were living paycheck to paycheck. You're wise with the money that God's entrusted you with, but there was a big question mark about, "Do I have a business model?" Because you've written the FOR book, right?

Jeff Henderson:

Right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You had written that, you were speaking around the country on FOR, but that wasn't exactly a guaranteed thing that The FOR Company, as it would become, would be able to move from side hustle to complete replacement of the income that you might have had as a lead pastor of some of the North Point churches. Talk about the process and any fear that maybe you encountered around that security piece.

Jeff Henderson:

If I can go back to the Chick-fil-A to Buckhead Church piece, before that happened, before Buckhead Church, even before the church thing was on the horizon, we went through two financial small groups at North Point which we were attending at the time, North Point Community Church, way back in the day. This is when I was at Chick-fil-A. Wendy and I were still fairly newly married so we go through not one but two financial small groups to get our finances in order. That was so helpful, Carey, because one of the heartbreaking things I see is when next arrives in somebody, they see it, there's an opportunity and they can't pursue it because they're not ready financially to take that pay cut that you had to take

leaving law to go to launch a church and the pay cut we had to leave from Chick-fil-A to join church staff as well.

One of the most important things to get ready for a season of waiting is to get your finances in order. That being said, to your question I probably violated the biggest thing you shouldn't do in career transitions. Don't quit your job if you don't have a job. Even the previous ones I was going to something, I was leaving Chick-fil-A for Buckhead, for Buckhead to Gwinnett Church. Now it's Gwinnett Church to, "What is this actually going to be? It's an idea." But I had enough of an inkling, enough of some intuition to go, "I think it's worth pursuing," because I had gone on a 40 city book tour with the FOR message and it was resonating with both churches and businesses so I knew, "Okay, I've done some field work to know there's something here."

It wasn't like I was just throwing caution to the wind. I had some relationships that said, "Hey, yeah, there's a three to six months work that you can do." You do some things in the early days that I did two years ago that I'm not doing anymore because I don't have to do it anymore, but those were like, "Hey, we got to keep... I got two kids in college at the time, that kind of a deal." We have got back years ago with those two financial small groups key, but knowing, "Okay, this is worth the risk." A lot of people have asked me, "How did you eliminate risk?" I didn't. You never can. You never will. Sometimes the greatest risk isn't leaving, sometimes the greatest risk is staying. I mean, and I see a lot of people that will cling on to that identity and that that security only to get called into a meeting to go, "Hey, we've made a decision. We've eliminated your department. You have to go now."

So be careful what you're holding onto because sometimes the greatest risk isn't leaving. But yeah, there were certainly some sleepless nights where I woke up and go, "Oh my goodness, what have I done?" In fact, I put a picture in the very first chapter of the book, I put a picture of my last day at Gwinnett Church. I just said, "I don't know if you can see this or not, but let me tell you what's going through this guy's mind. 'What have I done? Can I... This is so dumb. This is the biggest risk. Oh no.'" But you know what, Carey? Those are the same questions I was asking, the same thoughts and emotions I had when I was leaving Chick-fil-A so I'd been here before, I knew that I had a group of people, you being one of them, who'd spoken into this decision and say, "No, we give you a green light to move ahead." That gave me the clarity to keep moving forward.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Was it harder at 55 than it was at 25 to make a move like that?

Jeff Henderson:

Absolutely. I have a friend, Daniel Harkavy. Daniel said, "The older we get, the more risk we should take but we don't. The older we get, the more comfortable we get." The reason we don't is because there's so much at stake. I mean, if I let go of this and it doesn't work now... I mean, and I understand all of that. There's financial implications to all of that, but at the end of the day I don't want to stop dreaming, at the end of the day I don't want to stop moving forward. The other thing I've discovered is that there are people that I now know that I didn't know just two years ago. I mean, I'm going to San Antonio tomorrow to speak to the National School Boards Association. I would not have done that if I had not kept moving forward and walking forward.

There are millions of people listening to this podcast who would not have been impacted by it if you had not said, "Hey, I think I'm going to start a podcast." It's just... I can remember I was at North Point I recorded the first time I've been in your podcast. I was in a staff meeting room at North Point and I'm like, "Carey, I'll do anything for you. I don't know what this is but yeah, I'll do it." Now look at what's

happened. I think people look at somebody like you and go, "Oh, he had it all figured out the whole time." I think one of the things that I wanted to do in this book is to say, "No, no, no, no, no. It's a journey, it's a lot of losses that sometimes you don't see, there's a lot of setbacks, but the difference with Carey and so many other people is Carey kept moving." And you were consistent. I mean, consistent, consistent, consistent. I mean, you post consistently and this podcast is consistent and that's part of what led you to this great season, is you kept going and moving forward consistently.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Your new book, Jeff, is called *What to Do Next: Taking Your Best Step When Life Is Uncertain*. It's basically a career transition guide. It's brilliant. I had the opportunity to read an early copy when you were first writing it. It's a great book. But I want to go back because I want to get to identity, too, but I want to know the deciding factor for you. What pushed you over the edge? Because I'll give you mine because you asked me earlier, but you're taking me back to stuff I don't think about very often, but seven years ago in 2015 I had spent three months... The summer really praying, "God, is this the time for transition? Is this the time to hand things over to Jeff Brodie and for me to step back?" It was one of those things and it was mostly people saying, "Yeah, you can do this."

But almost everybody was like, "You're too young. You're barely 50. What are you doing? You've got another five, 10 years left." But internally I felt the pull and I felt the push, but then I got into... At the 11th hour, I got into this almost power move. It felt a little like Matthew 4, the Temptation in the Wilderness. I remember going on a bike ride and I remember thinking, "I'm still the lead pastor." Once you say, "I resign," you don't get that back. You can't go back the next day and go, "I unresign." I said, "This took 20 years to build. I have the opportunity to hang onto this longer." I had a few people who said, "You should just ride it for another five or 10 years." But I don't want to ride anything for five or 10 years.

I went on a bike ride, as I normally do when I try to figure out which end is up, and I remember driving down the road and really riding down the road and really praying about it. I just said, "God, what do you want me to do?" I remember He kind of took me in my mind back to law and I remembered walking out of the Law Society of Upper Canada, which is our bar association, having resigned and going into seminary and I felt a prompting that said, "Did you regret that?" I'm like, "No, not for a minute. That was the right decision." Then I turned the corner and I go up a road and I passed the church we built when I was still part of a denomination before we launched Connexus. He's like, "Do you regret leaving the denomination?"

I'm like, "Nope." Then I heard, "So trust me. If you could trust me leaving law, if you could trust me starting Connexus, I think you can trust me now. You don't have all the questions." I don't think we were even taking sponsors on the podcast. I didn't have a revenue model or anything, He's just like, "Trust me." I'm like, "Okay." On that day it was the final decision and I said to Toni when I got home, "I have peace about it. Let's go." Now we get the privilege of serving, as you said, millions of leaders a year in this, but I didn't know what it was. If you look at the growth chart, it was a baby compared to what it is today. I want to know, did you have a moment like that? Did you have a day, did you have a bike ride? Yours would've been a run or a CrossFit or something like that, but did you have a moment?

Jeff Henderson:

Well, I did. I did. I think I had a series of moments leading up to the moment I'm going to describe, and I'll try to get through... You're one of my best friends so this comes as no surprise to you but I'll try to get through this without getting emotional. But it was really those moments that... The series of moments that led up to this moment. To give you a little context, we were planning on leaving in May of 2020.

That was when Cole was going to graduate, then obviously COVID hit March and we're like, "Okay, we can't do that. We got to stick around for a while." North Point had decided not... Okay, later on in the year, "Hey, we just don't feel like it's the right thing to do to open up our church so we decided not to open up until the rest of the year." Then I began to realize, "Okay, I'm going to be making decisions for the two leads pastors."

There were two Gwinnett Churches that I was leading. "I'm going to be making decisions in the future that they're going to have to live with. That's not fair to them." So we got back with all of our advisors, you being included, and said, "Hey, let's... I think September is when we need to go." We were thinking through that. All of our advisors, including you, were giving us a green light and then I got... We went to this little Mexican restaurant with our family and Jesse was in town from college. We were walking her and Cole through this because I think if you're a parent and your kids are teenagers or adults, you need to factor them into these decisions, at least if they're still kind of on payroll, if you will.

Because this wasn't just my decision, this wasn't just Wendy and my decision, it was our decision as a family. I was walking them through this and said, "We love it here but we think this is the right..." The whole thing. Jesse looks at me and she says, "Dad, it's time. It's been great, we've loved it, but it's time." I just... I lost it, Wendy lost it, Jesse I think lost it, Cole kept eating his cheese dip because he's not as much emotional as the rest of us. That was the moment where I was like, "Okay, we've been released because of the... These are the three most important people in my life, my wife and my two kids, and all three of them are saying..." Then Jesse voiced it to say, "Hey, Dad. It's time. It's time to go."

That was just... I mean, I write about that in the book. That was just the moment where I just knew, "Okay." Yeah, it didn't make it easy, didn't mean that there wasn't a lot of grief of just... Because, again, we didn't leave a job, we left a church that we started. I mean, I came up with the name, Gwinnett Church. I didn't just hire staff members, I hired friends. I wanted to give my life to these wonderful people. When you... And I don't think people really appreciate that about pastors, and when pastors leave they're not just leaving a job, they're leaving their community, they're leaving their church. I mean, we [inaudible 00:30:53] we left our church, we left our community. Yeah, all of that. Now, one of the pieces of advice I've always received... Well, at least in these years of transition is, Jeff, when you leave, leave. Don't linger.

I see a lot of leaders that leave but then they linger around because they can't really leave. We just felt like, "It's time for us to leave and we want to give the leaders all the opportunities to go ahead and... We don't want to linger." But that's hard because you love these people that aren't just staff members, they're family, they impacted your kids and your lives. There's a lot of emotions, and I know you felt the same way when you left Connexus so there's a lot of swirling in that, but that moment when Jesse said, "It's time, Dad." That was the key moment for me to go, "Okay, that's it. That's the final..." There was a series of moments but that was the moment that kind of released me.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Let's talk about identity. I mean, you had a very great career with the Braves and then Chick-fil-A and then you were leading really a church, a campus at North Point that was getting national recognition for your work at Buckhead Church, to start over again with a staff team that could fit in a single booth at a restaurant and starting what would become Gwinnett Church. Now you're going into, or you went into, as you've indicated, the great unknown. What is The FOR Company? It's an idea in your head. That's all it is. You got a little bit of side hustle with a little bit of data, but it's not... You're not walking into this exploding, growing company knowing what's happening. Talk about the shift in identity because it's security. We've covered that a little bit but let's talk about identity. What did that do to your identity and some of those transitions that you made, Jeff?

Jeff Henderson:

I think an interesting one to think through is when I left Buckhead Church to start all over at a church in Gwinnett that didn't have a name, so I go from serving thousands of people at Buckhead Church to there's no one attending Gwinnett Church because Gwinnett Church doesn't even have a name. I mean, we didn't launch until 10 months after I left Buckhead so what do you do? That was a season of unknowns. That was a season of, "Where do we even go to church now?" In terms of the whole leave don't linger, we didn't go to Buckhead anymore. We went to North Point and so that was this whole 10 months of, "What do we do? What's my identity?" The big question I was getting was, "When are we going to launch Gwinnett Church?"

I wanted to make sure that I didn't launch it because it gave me an identity. When people asked me, "When are we launching the church?" I would say, "I don't know. We have two answers to that and I'm not the one making the decision. We want a certain number of people that are giving financial to our church and we want a certain number of people that are in small groups, and we can do both of those without a building or without renting facility. Until we get those two numbers, we're not going to launch. Really, the question for me to you is, 'Have you signed up to give and have you signed up to get in a small group?'" I wanted to make sure that we were launching not because of anything within me, but because I wanted to launch as effectively and as strongly as we could.

But that was a big change because now I'm no longer the pastor of this big Buckhead Church, I'm this pastor of this church that doesn't exist, that doesn't even have a name and where are we meeting and when is this going to start? It was just... It was challenging. Same thing with this season, and every season that transition's the same. When I left Chick-fil-A, I had a pretty big job at Chick-fil-A and now I'm trying to explain, "Well, yeah, there's going to be this screen and it's going to be in this grocery store that closed down but we're going to..." It's the whole description of what this church is going to be. As I'm trying to describe it I'm thinking, "This is going to be a total and colossal failure." So when people are asking me, "You're leaving Gwinnett Church? What are you doing?"

"Well, I wrote this book and we want to be known for what we're for, not against." They're kind of looking at me puzzled and they're thinking "What? But the great thing for me, Carey, is I've been here before. It's just a part of it and I'm discovering it as we go along. Even when we launched for Gwinnett, which a lot of churches do now around the world, even then people would ask me, "What is this?" I'm like, "Well, we're going to discover it. I think it's an idea we're pursuing but we're going to discover it as we go." That's what I'm doing now, I'm discovering what we're doing as we go along. It's been exciting but you got to have a lot of wisdom and a lot of innovation at the same time and a lot of patience, but really understanding that there's some things underneath all of that's happening in your soul that's really important for you to pay attention to because when you talk about what to do next, there's the hard skills of side hustles and personal network.

Your personal network, I think, determines largely your personal net worth because who you know is really more important than what you know. All those, those are hard skills, the technical skills, if you will. The soft skills, the emotional skills of what's really going on in the surface, that's really a gift if you pay attention to it because that'll help you be a better person as you move through this. I want to be a better person than I have been before, I want there to be growth. Seasons of next reveal things to you that you can't see sometimes in the present.

Carey Nieuwhof:

There's this thing, Jeff, and I know you know this but it's a game I play with myself on a semi-regular basis and have done it for years, which is one day when I'm not a pastor, one day when I'm not a podcaster, and there will be a day, barring a car accident or a plane crash or something like that, but

eventually all of this goes away. The question I keep asking myself is, "Who am I when all of this goes away?" I don't know that's a fair answer. I mean, I think I've disentangled myself from my identity as the leader of Connexus because even when I go there now, half the people don't even know who I am because they're all new which is great. That's fantastic. I think I've extracted myself from that, but then I do have this podcast, I do get to fly around the world and speak to leaders. I'm trying to prepare myself for the day where no one calls, no one asks, where you're not in demand. You're like, "Is my email working because nobody is emailing me or messaging me anymore? Maybe my cell phone broke, I don't know." Right?

Jeff Henderson:

Right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But that day comes. Do you ever think about that? If so, how are you preparing yourself for who are you when all of this goes away?

Jeff Henderson:

I don't know if you remember this or not, I think you do, but you gave me so much great advice, but one of the best pieces of advice you gave me was, "Jeff, you'll be surprised by how quickly you're forgotten. Don't be surprised."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Thank you Gordon MacDonald for giving me that advice, but yes I do. I'm not a very nice friend, am I?

Jeff Henderson:

No, it's true, though, and that's actually helpful. It was helpful because it was not surprising to me, and we shouldn't be surprised because the organization needs to move on, the organization needs to move forward. I mean, I had another friend of mine say, "Hey, the Gwinnett Church train, you got off the train. They had to keep moving and you're waiting for your next train to come by. It'll come by, but you're waiting on it." That was so helpful for me to go, "That's right. I'm going to be quickly forgotten." That's actually a good thing because now, "Okay, why..." Then you have to ask the question, "Why does that bother me? Why do I want to be remembered? Why do I not want people to forget me?" All of those are very uncomfortable questions that we can bury under very busy schedules.

I could have buried those questions under, "I got to launch a business and I got to go." But I hired a transition consultant to help me move through not just the emotions of it but to, "How do I launch a business? I've never been on my own before and all that kind of stuff?" But I'm telling you, this idea, this reality of how quickly you're forgotten, it's going to be true for not just you and me, it's true for every leader and it's a part of it. But if we come to grips with that and understand it and have a process with it and know, "Hey, no." Here's the great thing about your transition, Carey, is that people haven't forgotten you but if the organization imploded after you left, that was the biggest leadership test that you passed, is that the organization did not implode when you left. If the organization keeps going and the leaders know how to lead and they keep moving the organization forward, that's the... You passed, congratulations, Carey Nieuwhof, you passed the leadership test. It was not dependent on you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well...

Jeff Henderson:

Did they forget about you? I don't know, maybe, but that's a good thing they forgot about you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. I'm glad you brought that up, and sorry to be the bearer of bad news, but that was something that I had to learn. You go from thousands of people who... You're like, "Oh, look at all these people I know." Then eventually now seven years later we're down to a handful of really true friends that we track with, and that's good. I was their pastor, I wasn't their buddy, I wasn't their best friend, I wasn't like I played a role in their lives, but that gets really confusing. That messes with your head where you think you are. How did you deal with the... Because that was painful in seasons for me. How did you deal with the pain of realizing, "Oh, I've got one one hundredths of the texts I used to get when I was the lead pastor of Gwinnett Church and I actually thought we were friends and now maybe we're not." How did you process all that?

Jeff Henderson:

Well, I have counseling and mentors and friends that allow me to process with them and process this journey. Bob Lewis, the transition consultant, he just said, "Jeff, all this is normal. This is what I do for a living. I help leaders process the emotions that you're just..." I just felt like I'm the only person that's ever experienced this. He goes, "This is how I make my living. I help leaders process through exactly what you're talking about." It just helped for me to have a game plan from a counseling standpoint to process these emotions because I could have talked myself into, "I got to launch a business, I got to make contacts, I got to go out and speak, I got to do this thing." Which was all true, I needed to do that, but if I had let that overshadow the internal work on that, I wouldn't have.

Again, we're all works in progress so please hear me say that, but I feel like I'm trending as our mutual friend, Sean C, says I'm trending toward healthy in this whole process but recognizing that transitions like this are really, really important and hard. That's why in the book I talk about grief, and I actually put in the book, "I know you didn't buy this book to talk about grief during the season of transitions of next but it's really, really important and how you leave the organization is really, really important. Now, how you leave the organization is one thing, how the organization leaves you is another thing, but don't confuse those two. The only one that you have control over is how you leave the organization and you have to finish as well as you possibly can. How the organization leaves you and finishes with you, that's up to them." I think understanding at the end of the day there are truths that you and I would a 100% agree on, that it should not be about... Connexus should not be about Carey Nieuwhof, but your identity was part of that, right?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Sure.

Jeff Henderson:

Gwinnett Church or Chick-fil-A or Buckhead should not be... A part of my identity was wrapped up with that so pulling that identity away, you're pulling away some tendons and some muscles that have been wrapped around your identity. That's going to hurt but it's healthy. It's what working out does. It

stretches your muscles and that's what... It's hard but it's worth the pain of going through that because, again, you're growing into a new version of you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, and you were so helpful to me at the time of my transition because I remember some phone calls with you and you were like, "Carey, just finish well. Just finish well. Err on the side of generosity. Go over and above." That was such good advice because there are conflicting emotions and sometimes you don't even know where those emotions are coming from, and I'm emotionally mature enough to not even know what I'm feeling half the time so that was really helpful. I'd love to know how you navigate it. What did finishing well at Gwinnett look like to you? What advice would you give to leaders who need to finish well?

Jeff Henderson:

Well, I have a principal that's in the book that the better you finish your current season, the better you begin your next season. I just feel like that's a part of trying to finish as well emotionally healthy and valuing everybody. I put in a six week notice so I got together with our leadership team and said, "Okay, everybody. Here's what I think I need to do for the next six weeks to set you up for as much success as I possibly can. I'm going to preach a sermon series, I'm going to write all these notes to volunteers. I'm going to meet with the staff individually to thank them, I'm going to do a few other things. Is there anything on this list that you could tell me that you would want me to do before I leave here because for the next six weeks I work for you?"

"I mean, hopefully you've felt like I've been serving you for these 10 years, but I work for you. Tell me what else I need to do on this, because I am not going to take off and go play golf for four weeks. I'm going to be working right up to the very, very end." They all looked at this list, in fact I can... I think I sent you, actually, the presentation I sent to the leaders, it was called Finishing Well, for our leadership team and they all agreed that's exactly... "If you'll do that over the next six weeks, you'll hand off the baton to us and we'll be ready to go so great." I had kind of my marching orders for that and that was so helpful. In the midst of that, I wrote every staff member at Gwinnett Church a handwritten thank you note and a lot of the leaders at North Point a handwritten thank you note.

I mailed them on my last day there because I wanted those notes to show up after I was no longer there just to say, "Hey, thank you for the incredible season. Thank you for that." Which I genuinely... Obviously these are amazing people doing amazing work and just so great. I was so blessed to have a brief moment of my life, or, well, in this case 18 years of my life, associated with so many of them. That was awesome. Just having a game plan, knowing what I was doing for those six weeks helped me. I talk to a lot of leaders and they say, "Okay, I'm leaving in a few weeks." I go, "What's your game plan?" "I don't really have one." "Okay, we got to have a game plan. What work can you be doing to make sure that you finish well?"

It's interesting to me, in a lot of leadership circles we don't talk about how to finish well as much as we should. Now, finishing well isn't a two week, four week, six week notice, it's doing the hard work so that you can be emotionally healthy enough to say, "Hey, I am going to finish the season well and I'm going to work right up to the very moment that I possibly can because they're still paying me so they deserve my very, very best all the way up to the very, very end." I see a lot of folks take their foot off the gas pedal because, "Hey, what are they going to do, fire me? I'm not going to be here anymore." That kind of attitude isn't very honoring for you and it's really not honoring for the people that you've worked with. That's what I did with our leadership team, and actually met with my boss, Lane Jones, and said, "Hey, Lane. Here's the things over the next six weeks. Does this sound good to you?"

He gave me thumbs up on that. That was helpful, and Lane told me right before I left, he said, "Hey, you have left us very, very well. When someone leaves North Point, I'll point to them about how you left this season leading up to your last day here in September of 2020." That meant a lot to me, but, again, I've had these seasons from Chick-fil-A, Buckhead to Gwinnett and there will be this season here. I don't know what a next season for a company that you own... How that ends up, but it's... What I'm going to do is just see how you do it and then, again, like I said, I'm three or four years behind you in everything I do so... Anyway, that finishing well to me is such an important part of what to do next because as leaders we're always looking ahead but there's a portion of us that needs to look back, honor the past, honor the present before you move to the future.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's such a Jeff Henderson move, to write a handwritten note to every staff member, key volunteers, colleagues, bosses, but I love what you say because I think there's a part of me if I did something like that that would want a medal. I would want some kind of medal. I would want some kind of reciprocity. I love the principle, and, again, you outline a lot of this in What to Do Next, your new book, but I love the principle, and tell me if I've got this right, that you're responsible for how you leave the organization but you're not responsible for how the organization leaves you. I imagine that not all of those notes were acknowledged and that maybe you got a handful of replies. Is that true or not? Did you get, like, hundreds of replies and acknowledgements?

Jeff Henderson:

No, I didn't, but that's not why you do it, right? You want to say thank you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Ah, there you go. That's where I'm going. That's where I'm going.

Jeff Henderson:

Yeah. You want to say thank you. Again, that goes back to how you want to... "How do you want to leave? What's the lasting impression? While you're a staff member, what's the lasting impression?" I mean, it took me a while to... It was really early in the morning and I went to the post office and obviously the post office was closed. It took me a while because I didn't count all these, Carey, but I'd probably say it's about 150 notes that I wrote over the span of six weeks and I had to kind of stuff them in the little shoot of the post office thing. But I'll say this, it was so therapeutic for me to write these notes to people who had had such an impact on my life over... Some 18 years, some two years, and to go, "Hey, thank you, but specifically here's what you have meant to me and so grateful and all that." It was really helpful for me to write these letters out. It was part of the grieving process, I think. Whether I got a response or not, to me it's just the therapeutic process of, "Hey, thank you, and, wow, what a special honor it was to be a part of this." That was part of the kind of the therapy for me, being able to say thank you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's why I asked. Thank you for sharing that. Okay, so bit of a lightning round. You hired a transition coach. First of all, I did not even know... When you told me you hired a transition coach at the time on my... I didn't even know that... Never heard of one, didn't know it existed. What did the transition coach do for you and what did you learn in the process? I know it's in the book but I'd love you to share.

Jeff Henderson:

Yeah. Well, I actually have a diagram in the book that he gave me our first session together, and it was basically kind of a half smile or kind of a skateboarder half-pipe. He said, "Here's our goal, Jeff. You're going to have some good days and you're going to think you're really doing a lot better than you are, and then you're going to... Like a skateboarder, you're going to go back and it's going to be this back and forth. You're going to have really one good day and two bad days and two good days and one really bad day. What I'm here to do is to help you get so much momentum that you crest over to the other side and you're moving toward what's next, but in a transition, especially in a leadership transition that you've been in where you were a key leader in an organization, it's going to take you a little bit longer to crest that hill."

He was so right because, Carey, I'd call him and say, "Hey, I think I'm doing this a little quicker than you thought. I might be the exception to this rule, Bob." His name's Bob Lewis, as I mentioned. He would just smile and then I'd call him two days later and go, "No, you're right. I had a bad day or whatever." But just... I think helping me understand, "Hey, Jeff, the emotions that you're feeling and all the stuff that you know comes with next, this is what I do for a living. You're not weird. It's all normal. Keep moving forward." Then there was the actual business part of this. One of the best strategies he gave me was, "Don't fill up your calendar too quick because you're going to feel the pressure to go, 'Oh no, I got to make income or revenue. I got to fill up my calendar.'" He goes, "No, no, no. Let's talk through every opportunity that comes through is not a yes, it's, 'We need to consider it,' so don't fill up your calendar." That was such helpful advice and then [inaudible 00:52:14].

Carey Nieuwhof:

Tell me why wouldn't you? Because it's intuitive to fill up your calendar, so why was that good advice?

Jeff Henderson:

He was concerned that I would fill it up too quickly and better opportunities would come around and I would already be locked in and say, "I'm sorry, I've committed to a three month project to this company." I mean, I guess you could break a contract or whatever but I didn't want to do that so he just said, "Let's just talk about each opportunity. Let's talk about how long they are. Let's talk about it before you agree to it because you're going to fill... The natural propensity of, 'I got to fill up my calendar to make income.'" So that's part of next. Wendy would come on and he would just say, "Hey, how are y'all doing? What's going on? How are you feeling about this?" It's interesting to me, and I bet Toni, your wife, would concur. Wendy was never concerned about the business. She was not one moment concerned. I was really concerned, right?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Jeff Henderson:

I think Wendy believes more in me than I believe in me. I think Toni believes in you more than you believe in you. Not to speak for Toni, but Wendy was like, "We're going to be fine. I don't worry about this business. It's going to be great." And she was right. I mean, God has really, really blessed us. I think hearing both of them go, "No, that's not the right opportunity or yes, that's the right opportunity, yes let's pursue that. Oh, that's what this is coming to be?" I had another mutual friend of ours, Jordan

Raynor, who said, "Hey, Jeff. Don't feel like you have to have an answer to the question, 'What are you doing right now?' You can just say, 'I don't know, but I'm figuring it out.'"

That was freeing for me as well, and now I've got multiple things that we're doing which is so fun and exciting, but at the same time what Bob helped me do is to give myself some white space in my calendar to figure this out and just have somebody who's a very knowledgeable business person saying, "Hey, have you thought about what you want to do with health insurance? Here's some ideas on that." Just some practical stuff. We went through kind of a vision exercise of, "What do we want the company to do?" A lot of those things are just great questions to think about that I would not have thought about on my own. Finally, Carey, the other thing is... The thing that surprised me as an introvert, you know I'm an introvert, is I was lonely.

I went from serving 60 staff over two churches to going to a coffee shop and opening up my laptop all by myself. It was really, really lonely. Bob said, "Okay, I get that, but we don't hire people to be our friends, Jeff, so let's not make hiring decisions because you're lonely, okay?" Well, and he also kind of pointed us in the direction of making sure we're running a profitable business and that here's how you manage your expenses and all that. There was some practical business advice that I knew that he reinforced, there were some that I didn't know that he introduced me to, but then just the understanding of the emotions that came with it and that this is what most every leader feels like when they're making a transition like this, that was just helpful to know that it wasn't just me.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, and that's a credit to you, Jeff, because, I mean, as you described those things I'm like, "I think Jeff would know that," and you probably did know that. Some of it, anyway. Yet if you look at top athletes, they're the ones with the most coaches. They're the ones who's like, "Hey, on that swing try moving your hands this way or what about if you readjust your foot position just a little bit." That's a credit to you. Now, the book, I've made it sound like it's an autobiography. It's not. You do share some of your own personal experience but it's really a career guide for anybody who's contemplating what to do next. I want to ask you, when you think about next gen leaders... Anybody I talk to under 40, they have no idea what they want to do with their lives. I want to know why that is. Why? Do you see that? If so, any theories on why so many young leaders are just like, "Gosh, it's a blue ocean and I don't know what to do." Why is that the case now?

Jeff Henderson:

I think we've been trained by a culture that begins when we're in college or coming out of high school to say, "Hey, what's your major going to be? Check a box here." That's the same. "We know that you know what you're going to do for the rest of your life so just tell us which direction you're going." Most of the next gen leaders I've talked to, and this was my case, they changed their major at least once, if not two or three other times, because they don't know. I think we do the next generation a disservice by saying, "You should know at 19 years old what you're supposed to do for the rest of your life." What I want to tell 19 year olds is there are 49 year olds who still don't know what they want to do for the rest of their life.

I think we've been paralyzed by this, "Oh, everybody else knows." And sure, there are rare exceptions. Some people say, "Hey, I want to be a doctor," and they are a doctor. I get that, all right, but I think for most of us, maybe not all of us, but most of us it's a journey. I just don't think we've sold that. I think we've sold a bill of goods to people that said, "You've got to figure out what to do for the rest of your life." One of the principles I talk about in the book is you don't have to figure out the rest of your life, you just have to figure out what to do next. When I tell people that, Carey, you can see the pressure

just release from their face like, "Oh, okay. Now I think I can figure out what to do next." That may not be, "I leave this job to go to that job." It might be, "I'm going to go have coffee with someone who is doing something that I'm intrigued about and I'm going to go meet with them."

When I was thinking about this, you were the first person I called to go, "Hey, you made this transition from Connexus to what you're doing now. That's so intriguing to me. Tell me about what you're doing." Well, that was, "What do I do next?" I pick up the phone and I call Carey and go, "Hey, Carey. Can you and I talk because I just want to process?" That was a best next step. When I say you have to figure out what to do next, I'm not saying you have to figure out leaving Connexus to launch a podcast. I'm saying you, in your case, we go, "If I want to launch a podcast, how do I launch a podcast? Who do I know that can launch a podcast?" It's those next steps. I feel like we've just told people this gigantic lie, that you got to figure out what to do for the rest of your life. Maybe I feel like it's just figure out what to do next, and if you do that... If you do that consistently, it's going to lead you somewhere.

Then the other thing is for you to grow personally... I mean your Leadership Academy is an opportunity that you are trying to help people grow, and I believe that opportunities flow to those who grow. If you're growing [inaudible 00:59:05] when someone grows their own personal leadership, just give it time. Opportunities will start flowing and going their way. I think this idea of, "It just feels... I know there's a blue ocean out there and I got to figure it out." Yeah, that's true, but it's a series of steps along the way. That's one of the reasons I wanted to write the book. I just feel like it's kind of a field manual to go, "I can't tell you what to do next but I can tell you a series of steps to make that can get you there."

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's such good advice because 19 year old Jeff Henderson never would've seen your next 30, 40 years, the way you've developed.

Jeff Henderson:

No. No.

Carey Nieuwhof:

No, you couldn't have predicted it

Jeff Henderson:

I mean you and I, we were part of multisite church. You launched a multisite. I mean, when we were 19 there was no such thing as multisite video church so there's so many things that are out there that don't exist right now. That's why... But what we did as leaders to grow ourselves eventually led us there and it eventually allowed those opportunities to flow your way. That's why I'm so passionate about what you're doing and other folks that are helping leaders grow because that's one of the best things that you can do to figure out what's next, is your own personal growth.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You write about, I'm grateful you did, trying to answer questions like, "Well, what if this doesn't work or what if my best days are behind me?" A fear, that second one particularly as you get older, "Maybe I played out all my cards. I don't know whether I got anything left." But let's start with, "What if this doesn't work?" Because that is a really big question. We kind of hinted at it or answered it or addressed it in terms of your next move, my move after Connexus, "What if this doesn't work?" How do you

answer that? Because there's a lot of leaders listening who are like, "Well, I have an idea but I have no idea whether it's going to work." How do you answer that, Jeff?

Jeff Henderson:

Right. It's one of the biggest challenges that I've had to face in these transitions. I have to have a thought converter, and what I mean by that is convert that thought. You have to be aware of the thought. If you're not aware of, "What if this doesn't work?" And you're just thinking it then it's going to lead you to probably not make a move like this, or if you do make a move you're going to wake up more worried and anxious. Worried and anxious, I have plenty of experience with that, trust me, but when I'm aware of that thought, "What if this doesn't work? What if this doesn't work?" I have to convert the thought into, "What if this does work? What if this does work? What if I am able to help organizations get really clear about what they want to be known for? What if I'm able to really help communicators make their next presentation their best presentation? What does it look like if I could really help churches and their communities be known more for what they're for than what they're against?"

Wow. If that were to work... I mean, look at the impact of that, so I got to be focused on, "What if this does work?" That's the exciting part. That is going to allow me to get back off the ground when life knocks me down or I don't get an opportunity that I was hoping for. Okay. I talked about it in the book, I give myself the 24 hour rule. I'll grieve it, but after that I got to get up and keep moving forward. "What if this does work," really helps me see a whole world of possibility instead of, "What if this doesn't work?" It gave me a whole... Seeing a whole world of rejection and failure and I'm going to... It's much like when I left Buckhead Church like, "What if I'm discovered that I'm not the leader a lot of people think I am and that Gwinnett Church is just... I couldn't do it again?" I mean, all of that stuff, all that insecurity would rise up in me so I'd have a thought converter, "What if this does work? It's worth the risk if it does work." That kind of thinking and that thought converter helped me because the game and you know this, Carey, the game is the mental challenge. Your own mental awareness and your own mental game will determine a lot of your direction.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Mm-hmm. Is it a similar thing with, "What if my best days are behind me?" How do you address that?

Jeff Henderson:

Absolutely. I think the older you get, the more evidence that you have, "Wow, those were a lot of great days. Those were a lot of great days." But I remember when Rick Warren... I think he wrote Purpose Driven Life after he was 50. When I turned 50, like you did, everybody told me all the great people that did all these amazing things after they were 50. Yeah, I got to think, "What if my best..." If I think my best days are behind me, they are. If I think my best days are ahead of me, they are, it's just which one am I going to move into. Every season has a different season. I remember the early days of Buckhead Church were so incredible. They were so fun, but the early two years of this...

I mean, there's been so many incredible, rewarding experiences. If you think your best days are behind you, then that's how you'll think but I can't think like that. You can't think like that. I mean, if you felt like the best days in Carey Nieuwhof's leadership was at Connexus Church, then The Carey Nieuwhof Leadership Podcast would not have been born or it would not have been as successful as it has been because you would be constantly looking back at Connexus versus looking ahead going, "Hey, what if this does work? Wow, I think my best days are still ahead of me." That's that's the mindset that you got to have.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. It's a good perspective because you're right. I mean, I love those days. It was a lot of fun and a lot of challenge to lead a church but a lot of fun, but I'm having a lot of fun right now, too. What's been the most liberating part of the last two years for you since you went out on your own and made the transition? What's been a highlight, a mountaintop?

Jeff Henderson:

I think being able to travel with Wendy and let's just, "Hey, let's decide, do we want to do this? Do we want to add this to our calendar?" Because we are the ones that are responsible now for our calendar, and then on the flip side if I'm too busy I have no one else to blame but me because I made those decisions. In terms of liberating, it's been, "Hey, we get to make this decision. We get to go do this. We get to do this so let's go do it." Sometimes people get lulled into this belief, "Oh, I just want to work for myself. I want to work for myself." Well, I've been around enough people who've worked for themselves to understand yes, that's good, but it comes with a price to pay.

I think knowing that, that there's a price to pay for working for yourself because you can be on all the time so you're constantly on and if you let up then you might be irresponsible because you could be moving the business forward. But I think from a liberating standpoint to go, "Hey, we're in control of our calendar for the most part right now and let's move toward this." One of the things that we talk about and I mention in the book is that we want to build a life that we enjoy and we don't want to build a life that we work at 100% of the time. We want to build a life we enjoy so when opportunity comes, Wendy and I look at the opportunity and go, "Hey, it's a great opportunity but is this the right season for it? Is this the right time for it? Is this building a life that we want to enjoy?"

I called her... In fact I told you this last fall. I was somewhere... It was another weekend I was away. It was a beautiful weekend in Atlanta and it was a really cold weekend where I was. I was so grateful to be there. I was going to be speaking somewhere and they were going to do something related to the FOR books so I was so honored about that, but I just told Wendy, I said, "I don't think I want to travel this much next fall in 2022. I don't think this is the... I don't think right now I'm building the life that ultimately I want to live." Because in the early days, Carey, when somebody... You're on your own and people are asking you, "Hey, will you come speak?" "Yes." "Well, I haven't even told you the date yet." "Doesn't matter. I'm available." Being able to go, "Hey, let's build a life we enjoy. We're building a life that we enjoy." When we're building a life we enjoy, I think we serve people better because we're we're in a better space. That's been one of the most liberating things, is looking at our calendar and going, "Hey, is this the life we want to build?"

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, that's fantastic. I'm the same way. The last two years I've taken all of July off, and part of that could feel self-indulgent. On the other hand, you come back with fresh energy, fresh ideas and you find out whether you have employees or whether you have a team. I'm glad to say I've got a team so that's good, and I want to make sure that that's the case.

Jeff Henderson:

What's been liberating for you over this season?

Carey Nieuwhof:

I think, I mean, you're hinting at it without the word, but autonomy over your own decisions. I've really enjoyed... Now, I had a lot of autonomy as a lead pastor and as a founder as well, but I love the opportunity to try to multiply impact. I had the privilege of serving three, four thousand people as a lead pastor of Connexus but now I have the opportunity to help millions of leaders around the world thrive in life and leadership. That is a tremendous privilege and one that I don't take lightly. Toni and I do enjoy the travel to a point, as you say, and I've become much more aware of that. There was an obligation often to ministry that I don't have as much, and I love the summer so I want to make sure I'm traveling less in the summer. We're on the boat, we're with friends, we're connecting with family and I'm doing some deeper work. Then in November, sure, I get to fly somewhere sunny or warm or whatever that happens to be, but there is always an element of sacrifice to leadership. I don't... There are days... I had a day of sacrifice yesterday. It's like we're doing this event, I signed up for it, I was filming it and I forgot to hit record on... Rookie mistake.

Jeff Henderson:

Oh no.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Forgot to hit record, did a whole session, a one hour session, forgot to hit record. That's my own boneheaded move. You would think at this stage I would've been able to figure it out, but who do you have to blame for that? I didn't even usually hire a video crew. We didn't do it this time around. It's like, well, that's my own move. You never really escape yourself, right?

Jeff Henderson:

Right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wherever you go, there you are. It's like yeah, that's a classic Carey move. Great. So I did it again. I think I did a better job when I actually recorded it, but... What about the hardest part?

Jeff Henderson:

You hit record on this, right? You hit record on this, right?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, Jeff. Yeah, yes. I did, I did, but I checked five times and I have a backup recording in the background because it's an audio podcast. The video doesn't work, at least I've got this. No, I did check five times after yesterday.

Jeff Henderson:

Yeah, I'm just kidding.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Hardest part of being on your own.

Jeff Henderson:

Goodness. I would say probably the loneliness of it is... I'll be traveling by myself this weekend and I'm obviously going to see great people, but building a team... But then you're running your business so you got to go, "Okay." As Bob Lewis told me, "We don't hire people to be your friends so let's make..." We hired contractors so they're contractors who are contracting. We've got some very sound business fundamentals that are running our business, but I would say probably the loneliness of not being able to lead a team. Now, there's pressure that comes with leading people. Every leader listening to this knows that there's pressures leading people and so there's that, but I think kind of the loneliness of a season like this has been hard. Then trying to figure out kind of, "Okay, where's all this going?" That's kind of exciting to me but it's also a little... It can be a little nerve-wracking to give it enough time.

Now I'm almost two years into this and I'm like, "Oh, okay. Now I know." There's so much now that I know, Carey, that I wish I would've known two years ago, but you can't have that because it's growth. I think also I'm able to pace myself. I probably... Even though Bob Lewis was telling me not to put everything on my calendar, I put a good bit on my calendar just because I felt that it gave me a little bit more security. But I think probably the loneliness, and I've talked to leaders even who are around a lot of people and they're lonely as well. That's why our friendship has been such a... I mean, it's been key for years now but especially in these two years of doing this because you've been saying, "Nope, I've felt like that. Yeah. I know exactly how you feel and here's why you're feeling that and here's how I felt that." Having somebody like you and others to be able to process that with has been so helpful for me.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, your friendship is a gift, your leadership is a gift. The book is called What to Do Next: Taking Your Best Step When Life Is Uncertain and it's available anywhere you can get books. Did you do an audiobook for this one? I think you did.

Jeff Henderson:

I did, yeah. I sure did. Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Cool.

Jeff Henderson:

That's released as well, so excited about that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's under Zondervan and John Maxwell Publishing, which is a lot of fun. That's great. Jeff, anything final you want to say to leaders? Any final word for leaders?

Jeff Henderson:

Yeah. I would just say when it comes to what to do next, this isn't a plea for you to leave your job, it's not a plea for you to leave where you are. It's really a plea for you to keep growing. My friend David Farmer, who's a close friend of mine as well, he works at Chick-fil-A, he's been at Chick-fil-A for 30 years but he's had so many different opportunities because he's just growing. He says, "If you're the same person six months from now as you are now, you're falling behind." That's why what you're doing with the podcast and Leadership Academy is so important. I would encourage you to get the book not because you want to... I mean, if you're trying to make a transition I think it'll be helpful, but the next

version of you... This isn't a plea for you to leave, it's a plea for you to keep moving forward because we need the best version of you. We need you to fill a bigger space because the world is in need of leadership and better leaders.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's an interesting point to finish on because I have reviewed my next steps many times, and most of the time I don't make a change. It kind of reaffirms your calling to what you're currently doing. You spent years at Buckhead, you spent years at Gwinnett, you spent years at Chick-fil-A, I spent 20 years at what became Connexus. Then every once in a while you're like, "Okay, it's time to change it up." But sometimes that review process can make you dig in even deeper and renew your calling, which I think is just as important as deciding it's time to make a transition, too.

Jeff Henderson:

Absolutely, absolutely. That's [inaudible 01:14:23]. If you go to a deeper calling where you are, guess what? That's a season of next.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, yeah. That's huge. Okay. People want to find you online. They know where they can get the book, what to do next. Where can they find Jeff Henderson online?

Jeff Henderson:

Jeffhenderson.com. You'll see all the free assessments that are associated with this, and then my cellphone's in the book. Just text me and I'll text you back. Just grateful for the community that's just a part of this, and I sure hope this helps everybody figure out what's next.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Mm-hmm. Jeff, as always, thank you so much.

Jeff Henderson:

Thanks, Carey. Good to see you, buddy.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, that was a really heartfelt conversation. I so appreciate Jeff. I hope that was helpful and clarifying for you. His book is fantastic. It's called What to Do Next. You can get anywhere books are sold. Thanks to our partners, Compassion International and Overflow. You can equip local churches around the world while helping your church grow in the process by going to compassion.com/church. Overflow is a revolutionary software that empowers donors to seamlessly give stock donations and crypto to churches and nonprofits within minutes not months. Go to overflow.co/carey, that's .co not .com, /carey to learn more. Next episode we've got Tony Chapman coming up. A fascinating conversation where... Well, we talked about a successful career in marketing. Here's an excerpt.

Tony Chapman:

The first thing is we're living in this age of noise and we're all suffering with this incredible math problem. There's just too much and too many chasing a finite amount of time. We're drinking content from a fire hose, and even within that fire hose you put your best sermon, you put your best foot

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forward, you put your labor of love and you put it out there. There's a very good chance it's going to get spilled on the floor. That's the reality of what we're dealing with. What you have to figure out is, "Well, how am I going to get the attention of the people that matter most to me?" I think we're so caught up now with social media, how many likes, validations, what was the reach, how many downloads of the podcast, as opposed to maybe taking a moment and saying, "Did I change one person's life?"

Carey Nieuwhof:

Also coming up, Nona Jones and Stephen M. R. Covey; Patrick Lencioni; Tim Tebow; Brian Koppelman, the producer of Billions; Chris Anderson of TED Talks; Rich Birch and so much more. Thanks so much for listening. If you liked this episode, please leave a rating and review. It means the world to me. While you're there, check out a podcast that my guest today, Jeff Henderson, co-hosts called Executive Minds. It's in our Art of Leadership podcast network, and on Executive Minds Jeff and his co-host provide professional development and career tips for entrepreneurs, executives and nonprofit leaders. Just search Executive Minds where you're listening to this podcast. Thanks so much for listening, everyone, and I hope our time together today has helped you thrive in life and leadership.