

Announcer:

The Art of Leadership Network.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Welcome to the Carey Nieuwhof Leadership podcast. It's Carey here. This is episode 529. Today, we are going to talk to Brian Koppelman. First time we've really had a Hollywood, well, really, New York showrunner. He is the creative horse behind Billions, Rounders, Ocean's 13. Super Pumped and so much more. Also, Tracy Chapman, Eddie Murphy, back in the old early days, we'll talk about all that. Really glad you're tuning in. And today's episode is brought to you by Compassion International. You can meet a practical need for a child in poverty this holiday season by going to compassion.com/GivingTree/Carey. Let's get in the corner of the less fortunate this year. And by Future Forward Churches. Lee Kricher has a brand new book called Seamless Pastoral Transition and other free pastoral transition resources. You can find it by going to futureforwardchurches.com.

Well, this was a fun episode. I've been following Brian for years. We have a couple of mutual friends. And listening to his podcast, The Moment, for a while, and I thought it would be really interesting. I've always been curious about how Hollywood works, movies work, writing scripts go, and Brian is a perfect person to talk to about that. He is the co-creator and executive producer and showrunner of the Showtime television show Billions and Super Pumped. Before that, he worked on some pretty awesome films and, as he says in his bio, one or two that are less good. I don't know about that. He has a hit podcast, The Moment, and he lives in New York City, which is where he does most of his work. He is also responsible for Rounders, which we talk about, Ocean's 13, and he's done a number of other films as well. So, think you're really going to enjoy this.

And I love digging into the backstory. So, one thing for those of you who listen regularly to the podcast, you're going to pick up, Brian casually mentions he has ADHD. This is now a running theme on this show, so we go deep on that. And I also spend about two-thirds of the interview talking about all of his journey before he became successful, before he filmed Rounders with Matt Damon or did Ocean's 13 or any of that stuff for which he became known. And I just think it's fascinating. I think there's a lot of young creatives listening to the show. And so I hope you're going to love this episode as much as I do. Thank you to Jon Acuff for introducing us. Jon's coming up soon on the podcast, by the way, I think maybe next episode.

Anyway, really excited to bring you this episode. Why do we go all over the place on this podcast? Because we just follow the curiosity trail. I just think there are some fascinating people in this world. Brian is one of them. And if you've ever wondered what it's like to be behind the scenes on a movie with George Clooney and Brad Pitt, well, you're going to find out today. There's a fun story in it.

So, want to thank our partners for today's episode. Compassion International is doing some great stuff this Christmas. I absolutely love them. Our church has partnered with them. My wife and I have partnered with them, and wherever they serve around the world, which is 26 countries, they partner with the local church, and they release children from poverty in Jesus' name. How can you be against that?

So you know what your church is looking for this Christmas? People are going to start asking you, "What are you doing for people in the world around Christmas?" That's why you should check out Compassion's cool opportunity. It's called The Giving Tree. It's a simple way for you to share the love of Christ with kids in need. All you do is you decorate a tree with ornaments. They represent a variety of gift options. People pick a gift they give, and they help release a child from poverty in Jesus' name. So

check it out. You can go to compassion.com/GivingTree/Carey. I'm going to say that one more time, compassion.com/GivingTree/C-A-R-E-Y. That's my name, Carey. You can get your free kit there.

And pastoral transitions are inevitable for every church. Unfortunately, a lot of the time, they don't go well. I've heard horror story after horror story. But sometimes they do. And I've known Lee Kricher for years, and he navigated a very successful transition. He's got a brand new book that's going to help you with this. It's called *Seamless Pastoral Transition*. It'll help you navigate the dynamics without negatively impacting the momentum, continuity, or the mission of your church. It also has some great insights about three transitional imperatives that are really critical to address, and six pastoral transition pitfalls to avoid that can honestly jettison the whole thing.

So, if you're a church leader, you need to grab it, because one of your highest priorities should be succession. It's called *Seamless Pastoral Transition*, and if you go to [Future Forward Churches](https://futureforwardchurches.com), you'll get the book, but you can also get some free transition resources. So go to futureforwardchurches.com to grab Lee Kricher's new book.

Well, I'm very excited for this episode. And if you're up for the adventure, let's go. Here is my conversation with Brian Koppelman.

Brian, welcome to the podcast.

Brian Koppelman:

Carey, I'm so happy to be here with you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, thanks for saying yes, and we have a good mutual friend in Jon Acuff, and when he made the introduction, I've been listening to your podcast and, like a lot of other people, watching your work for years, so it's a thrill to have this conversation.

And I want to go back to sort of the early days, your teenage years. You're best known for your work in television and on movies, but you started managing bands in high school. So I believe there's a connection to your dad with that. I know a lot of musicians, a lot of teenagers want to play in bands, but managing a band, that's a little bit different. So, do you want to take us back to that time and what fueled that?

Brian Koppelman:

Yeah. I'm happy to talk about it. I'm 56 years old, and I was doing the stuff you're talking about from 13 to 16. So it's funny when we think about the various versions of ourselves and the sort of things we were certain about at various times. Really, what I enjoy about that is it forces me to reckon with the fact that the things I'm certain about now, in five years, I might not really relate to or understand. And in fact, my certainty about whatever the path is, I should be really open to the fact that I could learn something entirely new tomorrow and change gears.

But yeah, look, I'm one of those lucky people. I have a wonderful relationship with my father, and I always have had a wonderful relationship with my father. And he's older now, and I'm spending a lot of time with him lately and with my kids too. And I was telling my kids that the amount of time... When I think about my dad and my childhood, the first thing I think of is the sound a baseball makes when it hits a mitt because of all the hours that he spent throwing and catching with me. And he was my hero as a kid.

And he was an executive. He was really a music publisher and a record producer. And a lot of the way we spent time was listening to music. He was really hands-on. He became more of an executive later, but he was really hands-on in all versions of that process. And he would come home with just bags of cassette tapes. And from when I was really young, he and my mom treated me like someone who could process information like a grown-up could.

I had really severe ADHD. I had a really difficult time executing alongside my classmates on their schedule with lots of the schoolwork stuff. But somehow, when I was fascinated by something, when something was really compelling, I could throw my whole self into it, and I could really achieve a lot. And I think my folks were certainly, like anyone would be, especially back then when no one knew what ADHD was, I think they were pretty concerned about how it would all turn out regarding things like a school. But because I had these interests in other things, one of which was music, they were... But I wasn't a musician back then. Now, I spend a lot of time writing songs and playing guitar, but back then, I just understood, I think, in a way that was kind of beyond my years, just because of the hours. I'd probably spent so many hours critically listening to songs from the age of six to 13 that it was like I had a 25-year-old's kind of knowledge base.

And so, when I saw a kid in my high school, or my junior high school, who was really good at playing music, I immediately thought, "Well, there's this club nearby, and I bet you I could get the guy who owns the club to let my friend play with his band at lunch, like at noon on a Saturday before the bands play at night." And it was a way to get into that club and go see bands at night. And I somehow just... Everything I'd picked up about how the business worked from listening to my dad's phone calls and listening to records with him and tapes, I just went to my friend, and I was like, "If I can..." Well, the first thing was, the principal wouldn't let my friend play at a... He didn't want rock music at a school assembly.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right. Right.

Brian Koppelman:

I said to my friend, I was like, "I bet you I can convince the principal." And I went and made a whole presentation and got the thing. And then it was like, "Well, I bet I could get us into this club at lunchtime." And so I just started... It wasn't like to make any money. I mean, I definitely lost money making posters for the afternoon thing, but it was incredible to just be able to then enter the world. Where I grew up, the drinking age was still 18 then, and so I couldn't go to... There was no other way I could go see the music. But by getting to know this club owner and then some of the bands that were just bubbling under to where they were going to be able to play at the clubs, I was able to go to these places and watch music.

I would roadie, like very light roadie work as a 14-year-old, not much I could carry, but I would help load in, like I would take the guitars. And as a result of that, I got to go hang out at these clubs, well, bars, really. And I wasn't a drinker. I've never really been a drinker. I'm not a teetotaler. I'm not in a program, but I'm... just never been a big drinker.

So there was kind of no danger in hanging around, other than what I would see or overhear. There was plenty. But it was an amazing experience. I mean, so much what you do when you're young, Carey, isn't well thought-out, or I could try to put reasons on it, but the truth is, you're going by your instincts and desires and abilities. And I was just naturally drawn to all that, and they were very valuable experiences for me, because when you're a kid who's not succeeding in school, but everyone's telling you you're a bright person and you should be, you're an underachiever, you love reading. I loved to read, but I

couldn't read certain school books, because of the way my brain was built. It was like they were radioactive. But there were things I loved, and then to have a thing that I could call my own and really manifest and do was so meaningful, and it made me have a sense that, "Okay, if I follow my curiosities and enthusiasms, maybe I can find a path, even if it's not as traditional a path."

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's interesting now, and regular listeners of this podcast will know I'm picking up on a theme already. We're 550 episodes in. We've been doing this for a few years like you have with your show, Brian. And the number of people who've done significant things with their life who look back at their childhood, and they have ADHD or dyslexia. But ADHD comes up more than almost any other, quote, disorder. And I'm sure you're probably familiar with Malcolm Gladwell's work in *David and Goliath*, where he makes the argument of dyslexia that people like Richard Branson succeeded because of their dyslexia, not in spite of it.

So how did you...? Because I think, statistically, this is a leadership podcast, I probably have ADD. That has been not diagnosed, but by friends who are medical physicians, and they're like, "Yeah, you definitely have it." What did that look like for you, and how did you learn the workaround, ADD, or ADHD?

Brian Koppelman:

It was really... Well, what it looked like was failure, right? I mean, what it looked like was not being able to do the work and being told that I was lazy and undisciplined. And what it felt like to me was an inner sense of doom that I couldn't do the very simple things that everybody else could do. And it manifested in all sorts of different areas. But cleaning my room was an impossibility, organizing my albums, no chance. And really, what drove me crazy was I was fascinated... I've always been fascinated with words. I always loved to read books that were way beyond my grade level, but it wasn't just that I didn't want to read the dry history book. I swear to you, it was like the book was radioactive, and it was keeping me away, and it's a thing that people with real ADHD understand. You want to be able to do the thing, and you are unable to.

And look, the workaround for me, I was lucky in many ways. I was lucky that I came from an economically solid background. My parents were able to provide for us, so I didn't worry about... I didn't have to get a job when I was in middle school or high school. I could do what I wanted to. I didn't have to pay my own way through college, which, to me, the biggest blessing in the world is if your family can pay for college so you get out of college with no debt.

I was also verbally gifted, so I had certain things that were really fortunate, right? I mean, the stories I told you, I was at 13 able to walk into rooms of grown-ups away from a school environment, and for whatever reason, I had really very good skill set at being able to lock in focus, listen to a decision-maker, and influence that person, because I would've done... The thing I was fascinated by, compelled by, I was able to go all the way in on this hyper-focus thing that happens. When I would read a book I liked, you could basically hit me on the head with a baseball bat, and I wouldn't even notice you, because I had disappeared into the work, right?

And so, it's not so much that I found a workaround. It's that I found a way to work through. Or actually, I just found a way to take myself out of caring about being judged or letting those judgements of those institutions render any kind of final verdict on me, because I was doing something always that was outside of it that interested me enough that it fueled me and kept me going.

Mom... Also had understanding parents, meaning they were scared, and I would get in... Before, I would get in trouble and lose phone privileges and lose going out, I mean, all that stuff. My parents cared and were actively trying to make sure that... Because there was no diagnosis of that back then. There was no medicine back then. And there wasn't even really a therapeutic model that didn't include medicine. It was just like, "Hey, dude, do the work. Don't be so lazy. Don't be disruptive." And it was very painful at many stops along the way.

But also, my mother was really determined to convince me that I was bright and that this wouldn't matter. And as frightened as I know she must have been by what teachers in the schools said, she was kind of undaunted in telling me that I would find things that I really would want to work on and that I was smart enough to be able to pull any of that stuff off.

And what that led to was when I wanted to get into college and my grades were really bad, I'm sure my standardized scores were fine, fully competitive with the college I wanted to get to, but I, and this is the kind of thing I would do before people did this kind of thing, I remember going to college to be interviewed, and they tell you, follow up, but I didn't just follow up. I would write the person and call the person, and I would ask to come visit again, and I would send things. Like in 10th grade, I produced a song on an album that got put... And I remember I kind of was building the case, because I knew I wanted to go to this college. And I remember building the case that I wouldn't contribute in normal ordinary ways, and I might not on paper be the kind of student who seemed like this, but that if they took a chance on me, I would reward them in some way.

And years later, when all this good stuff happened, I reached out to that person and thanked them, because, had I not gone to Tufts, certain things wouldn't have happened. And that person and I still follow each other on Facebook. I made a real connection with this person, and I really made the kind of appeal... I guess people make these packages now, but because I knew I couldn't succeed in the channels that everyone else succeeded and because I had supportive parents and a safety net on some level, I would just try different channels. And I just kept doing that my whole life, basically. Later, much later, I got diagnosed, and I was able to get medicine, and I find that to be incredibly helpful at times and in certain ways, because the challenges, the other ways are so hard. But man, I just kept moving.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's interesting, a little bit of my life was flashing before my eyes too. I'm reading a book right now that's rather academic, and I'm really having trouble accessing it. I think you're right. Certain books are radioactive like you can't touch it. Others, you just get lost in, and they're such a beautiful easy read.

Brian Koppelman:

Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And there's certain things, it almost feels, and I don't want to put an analysis on your life that might be premature or incomplete, but I think a lot of us who struggle in traditional areas maybe just find workarounds. Do you know what I mean? So the club at 14 and this musician is a workaround, "Well maybe I can't do so well at math, or maybe English isn't my strong suit, but man, I can negotiate." You end up at law school, which is really impressive. I mean, that's not easy to do.

Brian Koppelman:

Well, I... Yeah. And I would say that's all correct. But the biggest, most painful thing that took me so many years to figure out was that it was really hard for me to finish papers. And I'm a writer, and I was always... If I really would've... I mean, you could add the things up that really, that grabbed me. I mean, when I talk about reading, and I would memorize movies and know all the dialogue, and I could always write two paragraphs that would knock your socks off, but I couldn't finish anything. And that was really the worst of it to me, was I just could not organize, and I could not finish. And knowing that makes you not even start, right? If you know that you're going to be defeated because you can't finish, it's really difficult to start and then do that to yourself again and disappoint yourself again.

I guess that's what it felt like to me, constant disappointment in myself, which is a really disempowering way to live. And I can look back now, and of course, I have found... I live a really fulfilling life, but I'm never that far from what it felt like. And so I don't want to be glib about it and make it like it was easy. I mean, it was painful. Because if anyone's listening, I understand.

At the time, those things didn't feel... They felt like escapes. They felt like mini escapes. There was no plan, like, "Oh, this is going to be a career." There was a plan with getting into college, but it was born out of desperation. It was born out of, "I want to try to be around really smart people. How am I going to do that when my grades don't announce myself in that way at all?" And law school was really about a series of things, but one of which was just trying to... Again, this is before an official diagnosis. I think I'd started to maybe read books on on ADHD. But once I was there, I really did want to find a way, I was older, to train myself to get this work done.

Yeah, that stuff was always... It was really a battle.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But what's fascinating to me is you did have some success early on, I mean, whether it was that nightclub when you were in junior high or meeting Eddie Murphy very early in his career. I think he was already on Saturday Night Live. If I've got the story right, you helped negotiate his first comedy album, First Couple, and then Tracy Chapman when you were at Tufts, was that at Tufts or law school that you met Tracy Chapman?

Brian Koppelman:

Yeah. [inaudible 00:22:09].

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. Tell us about that, because, I mean, it's really interesting.

Brian Koppelman:

Well, again, these are things from a long time ago. But yeah, look, I mean, that's part of what... I mean, part of what would happen was that I would... I know I made a decision to kind of follow whatever I was curious about. And, yeah, through this nightclub that I was booking concerts at, I then became friendly with the owner of that club, and Eddie Murphy was performing there, and yeah, he was a featured player on SNL, and he was so great. It's a long story, but I don't want take the whole podcast up with it.

But I snuck backstage and, I met Eddie and his manager, and I said, "You should be making an album." And they hadn't thought about doing that. And I talked them through why, or they might have thought about it, but they hadn't done anything on it. And then I woke my father up when I got home and I was like, "You got to meet these people." And I'd gotten all their information and connected them, and then they made a deal, and my dad made the first three Eddie Murphy albums, that were enormously

successful. And, for sure, that happened because I went back and did that. That's 100... That's the way that happened.

And well, in college, it's a much longer story, but that's an example where in college I was one of the people leading the movement against apartheid and for divestment. It was social justice movement, not in the way that it's necessarily defined now. But Elaine Pagels, I remember reading Elaine Pagels in this class I was in about social justice. I mean, this was in the '80s with this reverend named Reverend Graylan Hagler and getting him to come speak at this event. And we were doing an all-campus event to promote this idea that the school should divest from investing in companies doing business in apartheid South Africa. And a friend said that I should go. There was this folk singer on campus that should get to play at this rally, and that was Tracy Chapman, and I ended up working with Tracy and producing her demos, and my dad and I got her first record deal. And that was with Fast Car.

So, yeah, there were markers along the way that supported my mother's belief that I wasn't going to end up never fulfilling my desires to make some kind of a mark. Look, helping Tracy get that music to the world's one of the greatest things I'll ever do no matter what. But that was her art, her work. I was a conduit. But shortly thereafter, that became less satisfying to me. And-

Carey Nieuwhof:

You had a moment, didn't you, Brian? Does that involve the Counting Crows demo? Was that sort of a catalytic moment?

Brian Koppelman:

There were a couple of... Yeah. There were a those moments. But yeah, I told this story to Adam Duritz of Counting Crows on my podcast, and we're pretty friendly now. Yeah, I loved music so much. It was so important to me. And I cared about it so much. But when I was in the record industry, I'd realized, and it crystallized that this love I had for it stopped being as pure. And when that happened was somebody played me a demo of Round Here for a song on August and Everything After.

And I mean, just when I heard those lyrics and him singing, I immediately knew how big it would be. But I remember what I felt was, instead of what I'd felt my whole life, which is I want to proselytize, I want to call all my friends, I want to get everybody... Instead, I felt anger and jealousy that I wasn't the one who'd found it, that this friend, guy I knew, I mean, this guy I knew had the tape, and he said some other people who were in the A&R talent scouting thing had found it. But what was great for me was I felt that emotion, and then I didn't give into it. I kind of checked in on it, and I knew that was a troubling sign as to where I was in my life. And I went home that-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Because at that point, you were in A&R, right? You were in the music [inaudible 00:26:08]?

Brian Koppelman:

Yeah, I was in A&R, and I was doing that, and that was my... I figured what I would do. But a bunch of different moments add up where I realized this work wasn't making me happy for a variety of reasons. But really what happened was our first, amy and my first child was born. And shortly after Sam was born, I found myself in my office. I had gone 29 years of my life without ever smoking a cigarette. And suddenly, I was so unhappy with the stack of demo tapes I was supposed to listen to in this office job, and it was a good job, and I was doing well, but I was smoking cigarettes, and I was eating a double cheeseburger late at night staring at this box of tapes I was supposed to listen to. And suddenly, it

occurred to me, I was also, during this time period, often getting up in the middle of the night, and I would start writing the beginnings of stories or the beginnings of scenes, screenplay scenes, and I would never look at it again, and I would never finish.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Brian Koppelman:

I'm sitting in this office, and I was thinking about our four or five-month-old son, and I realized that if I allowed myself to stay a blocked writer, I had this thought that if I allowed the creative impulse in me to die, if I allowed being blocked to win, that if this creative impulse died, it would be like any other kind of death, and it would have toxicity to it, and that toxicity would ooze out of me onto the people I loved, because I would turn bitter. I would turn angry. I would turn my self-recriminations into not really being the kind of parent or husband I wanted to be, or human I wanted to be. And I knew I had to find a way, suddenly, to become an artist, not to become someone near artists. And I had to become a storyteller.

All my friends were writers, or most of them were. I cared more about all that than anything except my family. And I went to my best friend, my lifelong best friend, David Levien. He was tending bar across town, and he gave me Julia Cameron's book *The Artist's Way*. I said, "Look, I got to do this." And he said, "I'll write a script with you. We'll do this together," because he'd been wanting to do the same thing, and he'd started to. And he said, "But read this book. Do the exercises." And he gave me *The Artist's Way*, and I began doing the art... And Amy had always said to me, for years, we got married young, and she had always said, "You're meant to do more than what you're doing, and you should do all these things." And I came home, and I remember saying to her... And she said, "I'm going to clean out the storage space underneath our apartment, and that's going to be your writing office." And she did it the next day and we had this young baby at home, and she still said, "This is right."

And so Dave gave me *Artist's Way*. I started doing the exercises. And as soon as I started doing the morning pages and the artist dates and taking the walks and realizing a bunch of stuff about why I felt I could never become this, everything opened up. And shortly thereafter, I mean, I walked into a poker club at night, because I was playing a lot of poker, and a friend of mine told me about this underground poker club. And I walked in and called Levien in the middle of the night, and I was like, "I know what we're making our first script about." And we started meeting up and wrote the first script, and that script became *Rounders*. And so, once I made the decision, and that had a lot of rejection, but once I made that decision...

And look, one of the things about people with ADHD that's really proven and studied is when you're on a team, you're much better. And so, because I had to show up with David, and he was going to show up every day and do this work, I was going to show up every day and do this work. And he was amazing at keeping me kind of anchored a little bit and anchored enough to, together, get there and be able to write this thing. And we worked that way for a number of years.

And then, finally, I figured this stuff out for myself and ended up finding a psychiatrist who helped really diagnose it and figure out how to treat it. And then I was able to start really being able to write, still always with David in that we make all the stuff together, but I was able to write a script alone that we then directed together with Michael Douglas in it. And through all this work, I've been mostly able to manage my state and the attention issues.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, it's interesting, because you say on the one hand, it's hard to focus, on the other hand, you can get hyper-focused. And I think a lot of people can relate to that. And that was one of my questions. I'm far from the cinematic world. I've always been fascinated by movies. I love them. But I re-watched Rounders getting ready for this, along with Ocean's 13 and others. And the thing, the gift, the superpower that amazes me, like Rounders, I mean, I don't really play cards. I sort of do, just with friends or whatever. But the amount of technical knowledge, like you immerse yourself in a world, whether that's Billions, whether that's Ocean's 13, whether that's Rounders.

Brian Koppelman:

Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I mean, a card player, like the best on the planet has to watch that movie and say, "This guy gets it." How do you do that kind of immersion or research in a subject?

Brian Koppelman:

Well, that comes from... I mean it sounds... So, I'd say, if you're listening to this, I mean, this is one of those words, unfortunately, the word passion has kind of lost all meaning, because it's overused. And I don't know what it stands in for. It kind of stands in for these wishy... This is... When I talk about... I had such a fanatical passion for what it meant to be a poker player and the way poker players communicated and what they thought about when they were playing cards. And I was so curious about how they lived their lives, imagining that someone just shows up with their cash and a little gangster role of cash rolled together like in Goodfellas or something, and they show up and live their lives by sitting at a poker table across from someone. It was so unbelievably fascinating to me that all I wanted to do was think about it, learn more about it, and read more about it, to the exclusion of everything else, though. I mean, that's what happens, right?

So maybe someone would read five poker books. I read 100 poker books. I became friends with this guy who ran... There was a bookstore called the Gambler's Book Shop outside of Vegas. And back then, there was no internet. You would find the advertisement in a magazine, card player magazine. And I would write a letter to him, or I would call the guy. His name was Chuck. I mean, I still very distantly know him. And his name was Chuck Weinstock. And I would call him and be like, "Any new poker books coming in?" And he would send me... I would buy all these poker books, six bucks for this one, nine bucks for this one, 11... I remember. And Amy again was just like, "Yeah, whatever you have to do for this."

And I would read all these books with a pen, and I would find these interesting words or these interesting... And what happens is I... It doesn't feel like... This is the gift of ADHD. The gift is when you are working on one of the things that grabs you, it doesn't feel like work. Look, writing, rewriting, editing, those things are... There's pressure, so it's work. But, when I'm editing, when I'm editing the show, not editing on paper, like editing the footage with an editor, I'm lost in that process. I'm taken over by that process, and so that's the gift of it. Where that part of it, the hours spent solving those problems is... I get energized by that.

So, yeah, those detail... I mean, it was so important. We were so obsessive, David and I together. The two of us were really, again, obsessed is another word that kind of loses meaning, but I mean, we never didn't meet. We met every single morning and before work. He would come back from tending bar, and it was before I would go off to work. And we'd meet so early in the morning, and we worked for two

solid hours, sometimes two and a half, and we were so focused on what we were trying to do. And I mean, every single word in that thing mattered, and getting every poker scene to the extent of our abilities mattered so much. I mean, we really did feel like characters in a Springsteen song, like putting it all on the line. And it was probably in a hopeless effort, but we didn't care. We just had to do it.

And look, I mean, I still spend every day with Dave, and we're still... I still spend every night with my wife, the same person and those same kids. So, that part of my life has stayed incredibly solid and the same, and I'm still totally focused on those things in a joyous way.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I want to talk... I want to come back to your partnership, because I think that's remarkable for it to have lasted basically an entire lifetime. But if I understand right, you did a great interview with Jon Acuff on his first podcast, the Creative Slide, which we'll link to. It's still up there, which I'm grateful for. It was a great interview. He's got a new podcast now called All It Takes Is A Goal. But I seem to remember... Was this a side hustle for you, writing Rounders? Like you had your day job, and then you'd get together? Or did you quit your day job and then-

Brian Koppelman:

No, I mean, this goes really in line with a lot of what Acuff talks about. But no, that's what I'm saying, no. I mean, nobody was using the term side hustle then, but I do think if you were doing some kind of artistic endeavor, yeah, some people might have that bolt of lightning moment and decide they're going to throw everything else away. But, I mean, I had a child, and I knew we were going to have another child, so I just decided to expand my day, basically. I was just going to... But doing it first in the day, it made the drudgery of my job much... Because the day would start with the thing where... And it was very hard writing the first thing. You don't know what you're doing, and you're just trying so hard, and you know you're failing most of the time.

But I felt so alive, Carey.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. [inaudible 00:37:00].

Brian Koppelman:

The better way to say it, I was working from the most alive part of myself, and because of that, then when I would have to go to meetings and stuff, conference rooms, it didn't matter to me, because I had already done this thing where I was working from this really alive place. And I think mornings, even though people always talk about it on podcasts, and it's another cliched thing. And I'm not one of those people who's like the super achiever, like, "My morning has..." like one of these guys selling a lot of stuff, but I meditate, and I do morning pages every day. And it does start...

And I exercise every day. And those things, I would say, are also really part of the way as an adult I've tried to handle these things, as like, if I meditate every day, and if I can journal, and if I can exercise, and look, on some days, maybe I got the newest COVID booster, so today, I'm just walking. But most days, I do pretty rigorous exercise. But I do something. I'll walk probably five miles outside today as just a casual to do something. And I don't know, doing those things, it really helps. So the morning, getting to do a thing in the morning that kind of sets me right for the day is really valuable, and it started back then, I think, because we would do that work, and then that just kind of set me up to succeed the rest of the day, whether or not that thing was going to happen and become objectively successful.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, I think a lot of the audience would know Rounders. I mean, it had who, Matt Damon, Edward Norton, John Turturro, Gretchen Mol, I mean, really stellar cast.

Brian Koppelman:

Yeah, John Malkovich, yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

John Malkovich, yeah. I mean, it was a killer movie, and it did very, very well, particularly in the last 20 years. It had a decent opening, but it's just become almost cult-like, right, in its following?

Brian Koppelman:

Well, correct. And that was a real gift in a certain way that it didn't... The movie came out, and it didn't do that well in the box office, but within a year... So, we had this moment of having to take stock and figure out, "Well, why are we doing this? Are we doing it because we wanted some kind of success or we...? No, we're doing it because we love doing this, and we're going to..." So the weekend that it was coming out, we were already somewhere researching our next movie and working on the next thing, and we never stopped. And then, watching the way that the work got received two years later, three years later, five years later, 10 years later, 20 years later, I would watch critics who dinged it when it came out 10 years later write a review about something else and then say, like, "In the classic, Rounders." And I was like, "But dude, you didn't like that movie 10 years ago."

But it made me put so much stuff in perspective and kind of reaffirmed that Dave and I have to be the only kind of inner authority on what we're doing and that we can't kind of give that power to any other entity, whether it's a buyer or whether it's a critic or whether it's an audience. You don't want to be self-indulgent. You want serve the audience, but the only it works for us is to imagine the audience is us and then just entertain ourselves and then have the faith that ultimately, that audience will find the piece. And now, 25 years later, of doing this work, we've proven that out for us.

There is a group of people, it's not the biggest group of people, but it's not the smallest group of people, who really care about the work that we do. And that is something Seth always talks about. You don't need the biggest audience in the world. You just need an audience that loves what you do and that relates to what you do. And if you don't break the compact with that audience, if they don't sense that you are gaming them, or you're trying to do something else, but they know you're doing what you do for the same reasons, you're probably not going to lose that audience. You're probably going to grow it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

For the budding artists, leaders whose stuff hasn't been taken up yet or caught fire yet, how did Rounders get made? It wasn't an automatic thing, was it?

Brian Koppelman:

No, we dealt with a lot of rejection. It's funny, I had Neil Blumenthal who founded and is the CEO of Warby Parker on my podcast last week, this week. And he was telling me this great story of their first big pitch, and they just got destroyed by a person they most wanted, and the person was a billionaire and super good at this premium brand thing, and he just destroyed them, basically said, "This isn't going to work, and here's why, and you basically should give up."

And I was so interested in it, what he did when he walked away from that meeting with his partners, because I'm always thinking about how we keep going as human beings pacing... as human beings who try to be artists or who try to put pieces of themselves out there, and how rough rejection can be, and how much it hurts. And learning how to absorb that blow and then disambiguate and figure out, well, okay, what three things are valid? Is there anything valid in the critique? If you can get away from the emotional reaction. So breathe, take long enough. If you can find something of value to make the thing better, great. If you can't dismiss it and just keep moving forward.

And so, I got this lesson really early on, because all these agencies rejected Rounders. I wrote down what they all said. One said it was overwritten. One said it was underwritten. Neither of those terms have any meaning. They didn't then or now. All these kinds of things. Then a young producer, a young manager got it to a young producer who's kind of like the most junior producer in an office, and that person got it to their boss, and they brought it to Miramax, and Miramax bought the thing.

And the next day after Miramax bought it, all the same agents who passed were all on our phone sheet, and I just read all of them, their reasons for rejecting us, because the rejections hurt so much, because it was the first time, and they all had all these BS excuses, "Oh, it was my assistant who read it," or, "I was having a bad day," or, "I read the wrong draft," I mean, all these lies. And it just made me realize like, "Oh, right. These are lemmings. They're going to follow this thing. I can't think that they're..."

Yes, you need to work with these conduits, and you want to pick the smartest one or the one you think has the best instinct for... But what you can't do is imbue them with qualities of discernment that they don't actually have. And that doesn't mean cluelessly going like, "I'm right. All these people are wrong," right? It doesn't mean insisting that you're a genius. I'm not saying any of that. What I'm saying is, don't give them more power than they have, and find a way to be objective about your own material, and keep trying to make it better, and keep writing the next thing, and keep developing. I didn't stop. As we were getting rejected, we were already writing the next thing. And that's the thing, just keep controlling what you can control and don't give more power than is true to the various forces along the way that you can't control.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I appreciate you taking so much time on the deep dive of origins. We have a lot of young leaders listening, so I think they're going to take a lot of inspiration from that. I do want to shift a little bit and talk about Amy Edmondson from Harvard, had her on, and she talked about complex leadership and used the example of a movie set or healthcare institution. So, I have a heart attack today. I end up in ER, and there's a team of doctors, whoever's on call, the doctors, the nurses, the assistants, all those people come together to do life-saving surgery. It's quite an extraordinary feat of leadership.

But movies are probably similar, like with Billions or Super Pumped, your latest project. You probably get to build your own team, and I'd like to talk about that. But when you're coming together to do a movie that might take, I don't know, three months to eight months to make, you're pulling this team of people, most of whom you don't know, together. What are some of the keys to success from talent, actors, to producers, to key grips? It's a masterful thing to pull together, Brian.

Brian Koppelman:

Let me just first say, people in my industry, me... all of us definitely, at times, feel like we're saving... We work so hard, and it all feels so important, it's almost like we're saving lives. But can I just be clear that we're not the doctors? You're talking about the healthcare people. There's no similarity. I mean, what they have to do-

Carey Nieuwhof:

[inaudible 00:46:14].

Brian Koppelman:

... and what we're doing, I mean, we're making up stories for a living. That's what we're doing. We're making up stories. I just want to be really super clear.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's fair. That's fair.

Brian Koppelman:

We're making up stories. Look, I mean, I think I'm demonstrating too, one of the things is perspective. What is a leader? A leader has to keep perspective for the organization. First of all, I'm always asking leaders what they do. There are experts in leadership, and I am not an expert on leadership. I am just someone who tries to do the best that he can with his partner and a great team. The best answer I can give is it's about perspective and mission and tone. And when you're trying to do artistic work with a big group of people, you hope that you can share what the tone and the vision and the mission for the piece is, keep perspective on its place in the world, and then, allow the people you're working with to come up with their best ideas, and then, enlist them in understanding that, ultimately, you are going to be the person who, because of what the piece is, decides on which of those ideas is going to get folded into the thing.

As far as hiring grips and gaffers, those people are so important in the way that it would take me days to explain. But the key is, you hire a key grip and a gaffer who run their departments, and you talk to them all the time, and you build relationships with them, and they're and you try to do what I'm talking about with them. And you have line producers.

And making a long-running series, yes, the cast stays the same over the whole thing. And on Billions, we've kept much of our crew together. But I've talked to a lot of coaches about this, and it is similar to a coach trying to get a team prepared to play and win, and that's what you're doing. I mean, most of it, also, the other thing is, the first couple years of Billions, I mean, Levien and I were on set from before anyone else till... We would just show up... If call time was 7:00, Dave and I were there at 6:30, not to make a big show of it either. It's just like, "Well, we're going to get there, because we want to know, and we want to be part of it, and we want to learn, and we want to answer any questions that people have." I mean, I can't tell you that in season six or five, we're now coming up on seven, I'm there every morning at 6:30, but I'm still there a lot of the time at the beginning of the day, and being around and being a part of process.

And then when you find stars, I don't mean actor stars, we've had a number of assistants who've become producers and writers on the show. And so, that's another way. You bring enough people up in the system, and they carry the message of what the vision is and the perspective and the mission. But all of that is like... Dave and I are just trying to tell our stories in a compelling way. And we're dealing with the actors all the time, and we are the ultimate sort of creative authority on the piece, but we're surrounded by wonderful people. And maybe years from now, I'll be able to codify the lessons I've learned in how to do all of this. But I still don't feel like an authority in any way on leadership. I mean, every day, I'm just trying to get better at figuring all that stuff out to the best of my ability.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I can imagine, particularly when you write a screenplay for a two-hour movie, say, that you must, and maybe I'm wrong, but you must have a picture of what the film is going to look like in your head when you're writing it. And I think for a lot of us who produce content, whether that's sermon, whether that's a book, whether that's whatever-

Brian Koppelman:

Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

... we're working on, we have a picture in our head of what it looks like, but then you get hundreds of people involved in a feature film, and I imagine at times, there are healthy debates about whether it should go this way or this way or script changes or perhaps-

Brian Koppelman:

Well, sure.

Carey Nieuwhof:

... sometimes, it turns out very differently. How do you handle that? How do you tackle that as a creator?

Brian Koppelman:

I mean, look, you're in different roles in different things, so that's the biggest part of what you're doing, is protecting all that. And engaging in these conversations. I mean, I think directness is really useful, but figuring out how to be direct and pleasant at the same time and how to be direct and funny, how to be direct and empathetic, right, how to be direct and a good listener, so all that stuff is part of how it works. Also, in my business, there's just not really one answer. I would say one way to think about it is, anytime you have an idea that starts as kind of a feeling, like a sermon would, a speech, there's a feeling, there's an idea, but that idea is kind of twinned with a feeling. And often, once you start to work it, you sense something's getting lost in the translation, and it's very difficult to reconcile those things. But you can't let that stop. You got to go through and write the first draft of it or put the first piece of it together, and then keep at it.

I would say one of the things David and I do really well is that we are incredibly rigorous about the final product we deliver. We're going to continue to question ourselves. I mean, that's one thing, for sure, about leadership, which is I am constantly questioning my own work, not in an insecure way, not in a self-doubting way. I'm not doubting. I'm questioning. Those are really different things. Just interrogating the work to make sure it's as strong as it can be. I'm not doubting it so that I'm thinking the whole foundation is going to crumble, but that kind of questioning allows you to go, "Is this as strong as it can be? What if these scenes were in a different order? What if this line was better? What if this joke moved here?" I mean, you're constantly looking at those things with the eye toward making it stronger.

Carey Nieuwhof:

One of the things you have to manage is great talent, and you've had the privilege of working with some of the biggest names in the industry. I mean, Ocean's 13, that was an all-star cast. There's a couple of elements I imagine, because, were you involved in Ocean's 11 and Ocean's 12, or you came along and just wrote Ocean's 13?

Brian Koppelman:

No. No. I mean, we worked on 13, wrote it, and we were on set every day with the director, Steven Soderbergh. And no, that was a lot of pressure, and you had to do a lot of... If that didn't work, it was all just going to fall on us, because everyone else is great at what they do. So if that didn't get... It was going to be on us.

No, that was an incredible gift, I mean, being on that set. And then, I'll say, because we'd had this long relationship with Matt Damon, because he was in our first movie, between Matt and Steven Soderbergh, who we worked very closely with Steven on the script, entering that world was not just painless. It was really joyous, because Matt put his literal, not just sort of said... I mean, I remember showing up the first or second day. Matt was there, and he came running up and put his arms around the two of us and walked us into where everybody else was and was like, "These are my guys. These are my brothers." And that gesture from Matt just immediately brought us into the whole thing and brought us on the inside, and it was very valuable to us.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That scene, I think George Clooney is watching Oprah.

Brian Koppelman:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And Brad Pitt walks in. I mean, that's got to be just... That was such a powerful scene and such a break from the movie, right? Where did that come from? I was rewatching it the other night.

Brian Koppelman:

Well, yeah, David. I mean, okay, so that's one of the best things about getting to do this with your lifelong best friend is like, I mean, those two guys were just the cool version of me and Dave in that moment. And I remember.... I mean, that happened. I was watching Oprah and probably crying, and Dave walked in and... But if you're a writer, you kind of remember those things.

And so, I remember pitching that to Steven Soderbergh, saying, "We have this notion of this thing," and he thought it was hilarious. And I think Brad and George knew that they were doing some version of us. And I remember being over in the corner of that room watching the monitors and rehearsing with Brad and George and just looking at Levien like, "How is this our lives?" We were young, too, man. We were in our 30s. Maybe I'd just turned 40 or something. But we were shooting it. And I just remember looking at him and just thinking, "This is crazy. That's Clooney and Brad, and they're basically just literally acting out a thing that happened with the two of us." It was great. And they were amazingly kind to us, too.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I'm sure they were. Talk about your pretty much going back to elementary school or high school relationship with David Levien. I mean, that is powerful.

Brian Koppelman:

I mean, again, Dave and I have podcasted together. I mean, it's too... Look, David is just the best person I know and incredibly loyal and smart, and we really have been best friends since we were 14 and 15

years old. So, I mean, we've just been there through the birth of our [inaudible 00:56:13] children and our marriages and deaths of people and all the things. And so, it doesn't feel like he's my work partner. He is. We're work partners. But he's really my brother. And it's the benefit of having a brother without having any of the inter-family squabbles, because we weren't raised... We weren't trying to get the attention of the same parents. So we don't have any of the normal sort of problems that real brothers have, because we chose this.

And I mean, we have a lot of weird... Our wives were born... We found this out later. But Amy and I were just married, and we were driving with David and Melissa. They had just started dating, or they'd gotten serious. And so we were taking a trip together for a weekend somewhere, and one of our wives said her birthday, Melissa said her birthday, and we're like, "What year?" And David's wife and my wife were basically born at the same minute.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's crazy.

Brian Koppelman:

So we met them and married them completely separate times. They were born at the same minute. It's weird.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's bizarre. What have been some keys? You hear of people, "Oh yeah, we wrote together for five years, and then it didn't work out," or, "We had a difference of opinion and went another way." What has kept the relationship alive and fresh all these years?

Brian Koppelman:

Respect, I mean, the answer is respect, literally respect, from the littlest things to the biggest things, right, and the knowledge that all we're trying to do is make the work the best it can be, and that we are both working toward exactly the same goal. Also, man, we've had real professional lows together and real professional highs, and we're just in it together.

Look, I used the word rigorous before. It's a really important word to me, and we're rigorous about truth with each other, and we're rigorous about loyalty. And all that stuff was tested long before we had a professional partnership. And so, there's never been a moment that we haven't been able to talk to each other about what's really going on. And we pick up each other's burden when we have to. And I would say this, we never keep score. And it's really important. We keep score together as a team in the business, but with each other, we never keep score, "You did this work. I did that work. Hey, I made those three phone calls." I've never one time, never one time in 25 years of working together, I never thought of this before. I never thought of this idea of score.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's.

Brian Koppelman:

But I would advise that to anybody in a team. Make the choice. Don't keep score. Just assume everybody's doing the best that they can. That doesn't mean don't ever criticize the other person. It doesn't mean don't raise a hand and say, "I need help. Hey, I need help doing this thing, because I'm

working on it, and I need you to help solve it," or, "Actually, I've banged my head against this. I can't. Can you do this when you have the...?" That's fine, but after that, never once have either of us said, "I did those four things. Where the hell were you?" never one time.

And I think that just makes each of us want to show up and do the thing. And look, Dave's incredibly generous of spirit, and I think each of us try to really always think that the other one has our best interests at heart. And so, I think in any relationship, marriage too, right, if you just frame everything your partner does, your marriage, your spouse, if you can remind yourself that your spouse is doing what they can for the best reasons and you frame it that it's the best reasons, not the worst, that also goes a long way towards stopping petty jealousies and slights and things like that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So if you look at two of your biggest, most recent projects, Billions and Super Pumped, so, Super Pumped tells the story of Uber and its rise and sort of an inside scoop, and then Billions, the hedge fund financial picture in New York. What drew you? You say you get obsessed with subjects, which is great, but what drew you to those two subjects as the stories that needed telling? I mean, Billions in particular has just exploded all over the place. It's a much-watched series, well-watched.

Brian Koppelman:

Again, I think this is a whole... I mean, that's a whole podcast. But the short answer would be... I mean, the short answer... Here's the truth, right? All the answers someone would give you are kind of intellectualizations of a process that's really not an intellectual process. It's about kind of an alchemy. And I can tell you the things that David and I noticed in the world that made us want to write about these kinds of people. I can say that when we started working on it, it was very clear that it was going to be the kind of thing that had the capacity to be life-changing and that it was the kind of thing that we could dive into for years and years and years and years. It asks questions that are very fundamental to modern civilization and to America right now.

And so, we'd certainly noticed long before Trump was even officially a candidate that qualities, certain external qualities, or I'd say characteristics like verbal acuity, charisma, a kind of charm, a kind of personal power were standing in for qualities of character like humility and empathy and caring, and that Americans were celebrating just rich people for the sake that they were rich. And we were interested in looking at that. But there were a million different things and a million things we'd seen. And we'd noticed that prosecutors had king-like powers, and so we thought we could... And that billionaires were basically nation states, and that if we set a nation state against a king, we could have a kind of Shakespearean construct. And it bore out.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, it really, really did. Well, you're right. There are podcasts upon podcasts here, but we're definitely pushing an hour, Brian. Let's talk about your diverse friendships. So, Tim Ferriss is a good friend. Seth Godin is a good friend. Jon Acuff is a good friend. You've mentioned a dozen other people. You seem like a highly relational person. But they're not all... You can't just go talk shop, right? Like Acuff doesn't make movies, and Seth doesn't make movies or TV shows. So, what makes people interesting to you?

Brian Koppelman:

Well, all those people are writers.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Brian Koppelman:

We're all writers.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, that's true. There it is, yeah.

Brian Koppelman:

I think we're in the same business.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Same business.

Brian Koppelman:

I mean, we spend our lives writing and communicating and trying to...

Carey Nieuwhof:

Ah, that's true.

Brian Koppelman:

I mean, all those people are looking at the world and filtering it through their prism and then creating work that reflects the world they see or the world that they want to see. I have incredibly high regard for each of those people. And yeah, all three of those people are people I've spent a good amount of time with away from this stuff. They're people I've had multiple dinners with. And, I mean, Seth's truly one of my best friends, and Jon and Tim are each... Tim and I've been... All these people too are people I've been friends with, now, a long time. I think I met Seth in 2011, maybe 2012, something like that, and Tim, I met when right when 4-Hour, the first book, *Workweek* came out.

So, I would say, as you get older, it's harder to really make real friends, but you find people along the way. And if you do, you have to invest yourself in it. You have to give. I've noticed that adults sometimes... I can get in this rhythm. I bet you can because of what you do and your curiosity, where it's very easy for me to sit at dinner and just ask questions for an hour of the other person. But what I've realized is, for someone to be a real friend, what you have to be willing to do is actually share what you are going through. You have to actually say-

Carey Nieuwhof:

A mutuality to it, right?

Brian Koppelman:

... "I'm having a bad day." And normally, that's not... Or, "I'm wrestling with something. Can I talk to you about it?" And that's hard for men in particular as we get older, I think. But it's so valuable. And so, Seth and I do that all the time. I will go over to his place, or he'll come to me, and we'll talk. And now, I would say, I've had some friends... My friend Davitt Sigerson is one of my very best friends for almost 40 years

now, and Levien. And, yeah, these friendships are really important to me. I really value them. And I have high standards for my friends. I demand loyalty, and they demand it in return. But, I mean, all three of those people you mentioned are just brilliant thinkers. And, like I said, they're writers. And I'm also curious, as you are, so...

I mean, Seth, look, Seth in particular, I mean, who better to talk to about how someone should market one of my shows than Seth Godin. And workflow, those people are experts on... I mean, Tim and all three of those people are experts on workflow. And I will definitely talk to them all about that, about issues related to producing work on a schedule and how do you make appropriate demands on other people producing work on a schedule. And, I mean, I'll try to just engage and talk about all that stuff. And they're all funny, too.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, they are. They're fun, fun, people.

Brian Koppelman:

Acuff's hilarious.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Acuff, honestly-

Brian Koppelman:

They're all good... I mean, those are people who work hard to be good and are good and do good in the world. And Jon and I obviously see aspects of the world entirely differently. But I was down in Nashville a few months ago, and Jon and Jenny took me to dinner, and we just had the best time laughing and talking and sharing our take on the world. And as different as we may see certain things, there's an essential humanity. And when you open yourself up to people without judging them, but you're like, "Hey, we're here." And we laugh at a bunch of the same stuff, and isn't that wild? You went to an evangelical college, and that's the central thing in your life, and I have a very different belief system, and yet, both of us can look at the same hypocrite on TV and laugh at that person together, and that's amazing.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, and that's what I love about this show. That's what I love about the relationships we get to cultivate. And that's what I love about your show, too, your podcast, The Moment. You have just a hugely eclectic guest list.

Brian Koppelman:

I love it. I mean, it's a great... I mean, I've made friends that way, and what a great way to get to know somebody. I mean, when you've done this and spent an hour with somebody talking, you really do kind of know them in a way that it might take way longer to get to know them, sort of, if they were another parent at school of the kids and you were standing on the sidelines, you're up in Canada, I guess, while you're at the curling competition or something.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I'm one of six Canadians who doesn't like hockey and has never played curling.

Brian Koppelman:

But uuhh I don't understand.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Do you play curling?

Brian Koppelman:

No, you curl.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's it.

Brian Koppelman:

You curl. Hold on, do you like Rush?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh yeah. Well, Neil Peart lives down the road, so I've listened to my share of Rush.

Brian Koppelman:

You dig? He lived down the road from you?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's funny. Yeah. Just died a few years ago, but-

Brian Koppelman:

He was a genius.

Carey Nieuwhof:

... yeah, a huge-

Brian Koppelman:

Yeah, he was genius, that guy. Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I think the guy who did the electrical in my house did Neil Peart's house, if I'm not mistaken.

Brian Koppelman:

Yeah, I had Geddy Lee on the... I was saying, I had Geddy Lee on the pod, and he was in New York and willing to come. And one of the strangest things growing up, as you know, such a music fan in hard rock, and Geddy was so important to me. And, I mean, there are certain things, as long as I've been doing this, and just, I spend my life around such famous people that it doesn't mean anything, but that knock on the door at my apartment, my little on the West Side, and then Geddy Lee was standing there, and that was a really intense moment for me.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Surreal, right? What a crazy moment.

Brian Koppelman:

I told him, too. I mean, I just was like, "Geddy, you have to know, this is going to take me a second to... I'll be professional, but you got to give me like a minute and a half to be unprofessional please. And then, it'll all be great." And I text with him sometimes, and I can't... I'm so careful about not abusing that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh yeah, we all have those people in our life that we're like, "Oh, should I send it? Should I not send it? Did I say that right?" You check it with somebody, yeah.

Brian Koppelman:

I just careful about how often... I'm just judicious in how often I initiate a back-and-forth with Geddy.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Understood. Understood. Brian, this has been a delight. Any final thought for leaders today?

Brian Koppelman:

My pleasure.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's been great.

Brian Koppelman:

You're really wonderful to talk to. And thanks for asking such good questions.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, that is fascinating, is it not? And I love transcripts, man. We talked about so many different things, and you're like, "I haven't seen that movie." Well, we'll link to it in the show notes. So, you can go to careynieuwhof.com/episode529. Also, we have transcripts for the whole dialogue. I hope this was super helpful to you. Thank you to all of our new listeners. And if you enjoy this episode, please leave a rating and review wherever you're listening to this podcast. That helps us get the word out even better. Hit share and share it with some people you care about. They might be fascinated in the backstory as well. I absolutely love being able to do this with you and for you.

And we got a new episode coming up next. Let me tell you about it. But first, our partners, have you yet registered to Compassion's Giving Tree for Christmas of this year? If not, you can go to compassion.com/GivingTree/Carey and help meet practical needs for a child in poverty this holiday season. Get your whole church on board.

And Lee Kricher's has got a brand new book. It's called Seamless Pastoral Transition. He's got a bunch of free pastoral transition resources, in addition to the book. You can find it all by going to futureforwardchurches.com. That's futureforwardchurches.com.

Well, as hinted at, the next episode, Jon Acuff is back, but this time, he brings his daughter, McCrae. She's 16, and they're both now best-selling authors, Jon a New York Times Best-Selling author. And we talk about, well, the next generation. It's a really fun, different interview, and here's an excerpt.

McRae Acuff:

Yeah, everyone has that student pastor that's like, "Oh, I'm going to change these students' lives," and he throws out the lingo. I know someone that always talks about their inner vibes, trying to be all teenagey, and it's so cringy.

Jon Acuff:

Oh no. So cringey. You are killing youth pastors right now.

McRae Acuff:

Yeah, so like, "This helps your inner vibes."

Jon Acuff:

Because you don't think that person normally would say vibes, and they're saying it to connect with you, and it feels inauthentic.

McRae Acuff:

Yeah, I just want them to be authentic to themselves, because I'm not going to be like, "Oh man, he doesn't use the colloquialisms I use. I'm not going to respect what he's saying." I just want you to be genuine. And when you try to be cool and talk to teenagers, it makes me not want to listen to what you have to say.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Also coming up, Erwin McManus, Chris Anderson, James Clear, Sean Cannell, Lysa TerKeurst, Patrick Lencioni, and a lot more. And thank you so much for listening. If you loved this episode, and I hope you did, do leave us a rating and review, and I will give you something for free, whether you do that or not.

Churches that aren't just surviving, but thriving in this season, share eight common traits. So if you want to weed out the unhealthy areas of your ministry and lead a thriving church, you can get your free copy of the Thriving Churches Checklist, and all you have to do, it's free, it's an e-book as well. Go to thrivingchurchchecklist.com. That's thrivingchurchchecklist.com. That's a gift from me to you.

Thank you so much for listening, everybody, and, well, I hope this finds you well. We'll catch you next time on the podcast. If you're new, subscribe. That way, you'll never miss an episode. And I hope our time together today has helped you thrive in life and leadership.