

Announcer:

The Art of Leadership Network.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Welcome to The Carey Nieuwhof Leadership Podcast. It's Carey here. This is episode 530. Today, we bring you Jon and McRae Acuff. It's going to be a lot of fun. And today's episode is brought to you by The Art of Leadership Academy's Art of Church Growth. It's a course that I created. If you want your church to grow, I would love for you not just to have a great 2023, but why don't you position your church now to grow in the new year? Simply go to theartofchurchgrowthcourse.com. That's theartofchurchgrowthcourse.com. And today's episode is brought to you by Compassion International. Meet a practical need for a child in poverty this holiday season. Simply go to compassion.com/givingtree/carey.

Well, today we are going to talk to Jon Acuff once again, but this time we're bringing his daughter, McRae. They wrote a book together. It's an adapted version of Soundtracks, a lot of you know that book, and we're going to talk about who teens really listen to, why adults fail to connect with Gen Z, there are some killer moments in this podcast you're going to love, and creating a better soundtrack for the next generation. Also, one of the things that I enjoyed most about this conversation is you pick up on some of the parent-child dynamics. So for those of you who are parenting right now, this is fun.

All right, I've met Jon a million times on the road, off the road. We're good friends. But when you get him in with his kids, it's fun because some of those normal parenting dynamics come in. There's an AirPods thing that happens in this show that I think you're going to love. And better yet, if you can go to YouTube and watch it, it's even better because you'll be able to see it. Anyway, we left it in. We decided to leave it in because it was just so fun. If you have kids or were a kid, you can relate to this. So cool to have written a best selling book when you're 16 years old too.

Jon is the New York Times bestselling author of eight books, including Soundtracks: The Surprising Solution to Overthinking, and The Wall Street Journal number one bestseller Finish: Give Yourself the Gift of Done. When he's not writing or recording on his popular podcast, All It Takes Is A Goal, Acuff can be found on stage as one of INC's top 100 leadership speakers. McRae Acuff is a high school junior in Franklin, Tennessee. She runs cross-country and track, loves student government, and is somewhere babysitting right now. She's a writer at heart and "Will probably write the follow-up to Your New Playlist all by herself," she says, so I think you're going to love this episode.

Hey, we're about 60 days remaining in 2022. Can you believe it? Most leaders are already shifting their focus to next year, but don't write off this year. It's not too late to finish the year strong. What if you could finish 2022 with your church growing and position yourself for growth in 2023? I prepared a few resources to help you do that. My Church Growth program, which is open for enrollment, walks you through the steps to position your church for growth. I can't guarantee it, but I can show you exactly what it takes to get there by taking a thorough look at your leadership team, pastoral care, missional alignment, your culture, and also figuring out which barriers to church growth exist.

Here's what you can do. You can identify and eliminate the barriers that are keeping your church from growing right now and guide your church through the transformational conversations that will lead you to growth and deeper discipleship. Join before the end of the day, November 2nd, that's tomorrow if you're listening in realtime, to receive the Christmas Outreach Toolkit which outlines simple steps you can make this Christmas to make it your best one yet. Get instant access today. Go to theartofchurchgrowthcourse.com, that's theartofchurchgrowthcourse.com, to finish this year on a high note. I'd love to help you with that.

It's also almost Christmas but it's not too late to do something meaningful. Your church is going to be asking you, "Hey, what are we doing for Christmas this year for those less fortunate?" Why not partner with Compassion? They've got this thing called a Giving Tree. You put it up in your lobby, or lobbies if you've got multiple locations, and on there are some life-giving gifts that your congregation can just pick up a tag, an ornament, say "We're going to give this this year," and a child has his or her practical needs met this Christmas. It's not too late. Head on over to compassion.com/givingtree/carey. That's compassion.com/givingtree/carey. And you can still get in on meeting a practical need for a child in poverty this holiday season. Best yet, Compassion partners with the local church so check it out at compassion.com/givingtree/carey.

Let's get into a really fun conversation all about the creative process, about what Gen Z is thinking about and some really cool dynamics between Jon and his daughter, McRae. Let's go.

Jon and McRae, welcome to the podcast.

Jon Acuff:

Yeah, thanks for having us today.

McRae Acuff:

Thanks for having us.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I want to get started in this place. You wrote a whole new book, and Jon, maybe this is a question more for you, but you released Soundtracks... What was that? Was that in 2021? When did that-

Jon Acuff:

2021. I was like, "What's the best time to release the book?" And I thought, "Pandemic. That's the perfect time."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, absolutely.

Jon Acuff:

"Perfect time to-"

Carey Nieuwhof:

People get to bookstores so quickly and you're speaking [inaudible 00:05:36].

Jon Acuff:

Yeah. They're out, there's a lot of foot traffic, a lot of foot traffic at malls and stuff so I was just like, "Oh yeah, let's do it. Let's do that."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Nobody's paranoid. At least it wasn't 2020. At that point, I remember they weren't even printing books. We heard stories from publishers.

Jon Acuff:

Oh, yeah. [inaudible 00:05:50].

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's like, "We're out of paper." It's like, "What? Not out of paper."

Jon Acuff:

The Suez Canal was involved at some point. That's when you know it's bad when a canal you haven't thought about since the third grade is suddenly impacting your life in a negative way. And you're like, "We've got a lot of issues." Fortunately it wasn't that bad.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And your third grade teacher is "See, you needed this knowledge. I told you."

Jon Acuff:

You got that B- and now it's finally paying off.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What a lot of people do, just knowing the book industry as you do is they would say, "Great, let's just hire a ghost writer and do a kid's version or a teenage version of Soundtracks." But instead you decide to sit down and say to your daughters, L.E. and McRae, "Hey, let's write a book together." What was the thinking behind that? That "Let's do a whole other thing." And it is a new book. If you read Soundtracks, you've not read Your New Playlist. It's a whole other.. Because I've read them both.

Jon Acuff:

The book came about because parents asked for it. I've always said it's better to meet a need than invent a need. It's really expensive as a leader to invent a need. It's expensive, it's time-consuming, and you don't know if it's going to work. It's a lot more fun to meet a need. When Soundtracks came out, parents immediately, for the first time ever of any of my books said, "Do you have one for teenagers? If I could've learned how to change my mindset at that age, it would've changed everything. And I didn't."

Carey Nieuwhof:

So you didn't get that for Finish, you didn't get that for-

Jon Acuff:

No, nobody. Do Over. Nobody asked for a teen version of Do Over. And so I decided, "I need to write this book. But if I wrote it alone, it would sound like an adult trying to sound young." So McRae and L.E., I said, "Hey, I think we can do this. I think I can coach you through the process. This will be the most extended version of bring your daughter to workday. Let's try it." So that's how it came about.

Carey Nieuwhof:

McRae's nodding. "Yeah. If my dad tried to write it would sound like an adult trying to sound like a teenager." You agree with that?

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McRae Acuff:

Totally. He would be like, "Hey, what's dope?" He would say crazy things.

Jon Acuff:

What's the Harry Styles joke you edited out?

McRae Acuff:

It was a header, it was big font and it said, "No offense to Harry Styles, but there's really more than one direction."

Jon Acuff:

Yeah, it was terrible. And she was like, "Dad, this is horrible."

McRae Acuff:

It was horrific.

Jon Acuff:

"This is a terrible dad joke." So Crae was our dad joke police. She was like, "I can't have any book that has my name on it be so full of dad jokes."

Carey Nieuwhof:

So you were really the editor. You had to edit out all the embarrassing parts. Is that right?

McRae Acuff:

Yes.

Jon Acuff:

And Crae you would come in and go "The..." Carey, some of how we wrote it. Because I think the process is interesting. I would give them assignments and say, "Hey, here's the topic we're talking about in this chapter. What's a teen version of that? Help me understand because I don't understand." And then McRae would go back and go, "Here's 15 things that a teenager is dealing with." And usually 13 of them were a surprise to me.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow. You guys really... You and your sister Crae, you really wrote the book, right?

McRae Acuff:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Most of it. Dad got involved at the beginning and the end. Talk about that process. I think it was you who said in the credits that you've always wanted to write a book?

McRae Acuff:

He would give us assignments. He'd be like, "Hey, write 500 words about so and so." Or be like, "Hey, I want you to go around and listen for 50 of" whatever the topic would be. And then we'd write it and then he would help us adapt it to more book e-writing. Because I'm used to writing in the academic like, "Oh you need concrete details, blah, blah, blah." And he'd be like, "Paragraph break, paragraph break." And I'm like, "Whoa. It's a lot of paragraph breaks."

Jon Acuff:

They said, "Dad, we need paragraphs." And I was like, "Single sentences, people have short attention spans, lots of entries and exits to our thoughts. We got to go in, get out, SWAT team kind of thing. You get in the window, you say a thought, you get back out, you get it in." They were much more intro, three main points, conclusion.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Which is I guess how you write for school, right?

McRae Acuff:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

For your papers. It's interesting because when I started writing books, I had the same thought. I'm like "My English teachers are coming out of retirement to rebel against my writing style." Because I'm with you Jon. Everything's a paragraph, right?

Jon Acuff:

Well, you throw the rules out the window and go, "How do I make this highly readable or highly fun?" Versus, "Oh, I can't have a sentence in with a preposition." I think you need to know the rules, but then I think you need to know them so you can break them so that... I've never had somebody say, "I read your book, but I didn't like the grammar." That's not what they say. They say, "I read your book, I found it helpful. Here's how it was helpful." McRae's right, she did have to suspend some of what she's taught because she's in that formal stage of learning and I had to help them expand from that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's interesting too, Jon, because I think you're seen as being pretty relevant. You're years away from even your 50th birthday, et cetera, et cetera. A lot of leaders would say, "Yeah, Jon's pretty young or young attitude, young heart, fun attitude." But there were definitely some generational differences that came up in the writing. What were some of the other generational differences you saw other than humor or style, McRae?

McRae Acuff:

He would just sometimes not know the terminology. He'd say the prom, it's like "Prom," you don't say "The prom." Or just the way you would structure stuff. I'm like, "No one would say that that way."

Jon Acuff:

Prom was our favorite example because I grew up going to the prom and I got invited to the prom and they were like, "Duh, that sounds like a thousand years old." I think Carey, the other thing, they don't use capitalizations in text messaging. Every kid has their caps and their punctuation off. So they're like "No, dad, that's old-fashioned." If we pulled out, "Hey, this is what a text would sound like," we had to have that kind of conversation. It was little things like that that stuck out to me. But then it was also... McRae briefly touched on this, what they would hear friends say. So I would say, "Hey, today we're talking about specific fears." And they would come back a week later and go at the lunch table. "These are five things, five real people said." Again, I think you can tell when a book has been written about a topic versus when it's been written by somebody who's in the trenches and there's a difference. And so that was one of their lessons, was, "Okay, what are..."

Carey, in my new book I mentioned a string of goals and this is a book that comes out next fall. But one of them, I was like, "Declutter your attic. Lose five pounds. Make enough money that you can spend to fly your parents back first class to Holland so they can see the Tulip Festival." That's something you did. And in the book you can feel it. There's realness to it. I kept having them go, "Okay, this feels general, let's get real, what's real look like?"

Carey Nieuwhof:

Let's go there because you've hinted at it a couple times, McRae, what's real? How old are you right now as we record this interview?

McRae Acuff:

16.

Carey Nieuwhof:

16? So what's real in the life of a 16 year old?

McRae Acuff:

I would say school's really important. My relationships through school with my friends. I would say there's a lot of... I know my life is very school-focused.

Jon Acuff:

And also I would say the opening chapter was her idea. The very first thing that happens in the book is a text message. Crae explain that story because it's your story. It was your idea to put it in. And then I'll tell you what I think about it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And this text message has punctuation and periods [inaudible 00:13:42].

Jon Acuff:

Well, it was written by an adult. It was from an adult. It wasn't written by a teenager.

McRae Acuff:

I played lacrosse all through high school and I played in ninth grade. And then in 10th grade, my lacrosse coach cut me by sending me text message. And I thought that it'd be a good idea to include it in the

book because it was one, like a broken soundtrack factory. And also because everyone my age is going to face some sort of rejection, being cut from a team or not making a play or just any kind of rejection.

Jon Acuff:

A date for homecoming.

McRae Acuff:

So I just thought it was very universal feeling that everyone experiences it'd be a good way to kickstart the book.

Jon Acuff:

And I was glad because I didn't force it on her. That was the thing. That was the other dance, Carey, and you've experienced this. As you grow as a leader, you have to realize it's not just your story, it's your family story too. Every leader, let's pick on pastors for a second. Every pastor has had an illustration at some point that their spouse said after, "Hey, I would've loved veto power on that one before you did that one, because we're a unit and that was not your story to share." You go, "Oh."

Carey Nieuwhof:

[inaudible 00:14:48] been embarrassing.

Jon Acuff:

Yeah, that was embarrassing. And so for me that she said, and this was a week after, because the night it happened was a hard night. Crae what were some of the soundtracks, the [inaudible 00:14:58] soundtracks you heard when you got cut?

McRae Acuff:

I thought that my life was over. None of my friends in lacrosse would talk to me. Everyone would think I was a loser. All this stuff that wasn't true. It was just very overwhelming at the time.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I can see that. Tell me what are some other things? Because we have a ton of parents listening. Some of them have teenagers, some of them have college-aged kids. Jon, you've got both. And then some of them are preschoolers and they don't have an iPhone yet, but they know that the time is coming when that's going to happen. What do parents, McRae, need to know about the world that kids are in? Because I think if you're 25, you don't understand the world of a 16-year old right now. Help us understand.

McRae Acuff:

Some things that don't seem like they're a big deal, are a big deal. Finding a seat in the cafeteria, that's a huge deal. Or every year you get new classes and wondering who's going to be in your classes is really big deal. Or just small things that seem like obsolete can mean the world to teenagers.

Jon Acuff:

And also Carey, the other thing you have to remember is Crae and her friends are part of the two year COVID gap. They are carrying a bruise that parents can't begin to understand both in learning, behind in education, behind in social. And then the other thing that I think parents need to understand is that politics impacted kids in a way it never had before. Because very rarely at a lunch table would kids sit differently because of political views. But then the masks became political and kids would separate based on masks. So now you've-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Masked kids, unmasked kids. You're right.

Jon Acuff:

Exactly. Now you've got sophomores that are divided on political lines. That had never happened. McRae's generation was never like, "Hey, I'd really like to talk about our policy views as a lunch table so that we can divide up." That never happened. So that's the other thing that I think... McRae can't even talk about it because she's so deep into it. But as a parent on the outside I can see and go, "Oh." Some kids didn't come back. Some kids stayed home and never came back. And who knows where they are. And so all of that is in the mix for this generation as well, that we as parents have to go, "Oh that's right, they experienced it." I worked from home. You worked from home. The laptop culture just did more laptop culture. But high school, your kids, had a complete... They were the frontline of some cultural wars. And that's really hard.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I've got to imagine that social media just amplifies it because in the examples that you said Crae. I remember trying to pick a... I saw my high school cafeteria when you were describing that, and I know where I usually sat and it was loaded, but not really. It's just a lunch period. And then with being cut from a team, et cetera. Or who's going to be in your class, who's not going to be in your class. But I can only imagine that social media has made that 10,000 times... The stakes are just up there in a way they weren't. Because I think it was an interview, maybe it was with the interview you did with Annie F. Downs, I can't remember. You talked about you go to a party and you know who's invited, who's not invited, you see on Snapchat or on Instagram who's in. You are so much more aware.

I'm not exactly the most social guy. So I wasn't always a hundred percent aware of what other people were saying about me. But now everybody knows. How is that a factor? Either of you take a crack at this, but I'd love to start with McRae.

Jon Acuff:

I'd love to hear Crae's response.

McRae Acuff:

I would say just it's easy. You had no way to know. "Oh all my friends are hanging out with me." It's really easy to get your feelings hurt. And having social media, it's such a platform, people can be really outspoken about whatever they believe and it can cause arguments or like "Oh, I don't want to associate myself with them." It's a balance of "I want to be on this platform so I can connect with my friends, but I also don't want to be on this platform so I don't feel left out."

Jon Acuff:

That's the thing Carey, is that they don't send... Let's take Snapchat, Let's just take Snapchat as an example. There's times when I would have a hard line on certain technologies, but then McRae wouldn't be connected to her friends. Her generation doesn't text message, they message each other on Snapchat. So if I say "No Snapchat," I might as well say "No phone" because I've now removed the single vehicle of communication. It's not that they're just using it for funny videos, it's how they're communicating. But to her point about you can use the platform and cause arguments, it goes back to, again, 10 years ago, 20 years ago, if a student felt a certain way about an issue, they didn't have a megaphone to tell the whole school and invite comment. Now they do.

So what happens is kids will go, "This is my thing." And they'll scream it out and then other kids will screenshot it, will share it, will comment on it, will... And it spirals. And none of them have had how to have a personal brand lesson or how... I think about the number of mistakes I've made over the last 10 years trying to build a personal brand. But I started mid-thirties, I didn't start at 13. That's the other thing that it's hard to appreciate that wow, there's hashtags that kids are using that are drawing division and there's clubs that are drawing division and how do you help as a parent? How do you help navigate that?

McRae Acuff:

Teenagers as a whole are already outspoken and then you added the aspect of social media and it's like "Boom."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Is there a fear, McRae, of being canceled if you say the wrong thing? And I'm not saying nationally, you don't have a career, but canceled from your friend group, canceled from high school, canceled from your peers?

McRae Acuff:

That's always an underlying thing of "I don't want to post something or repost something that would get me canceled." Because I feel like everyone's very emotional these days. And so I'm always very careful to think like "Oh if I thought this way, could I interpret this as this?" You just have to be really careful and socially thoughtful.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It feels like head games on steroids really.

Jon Acuff:

And what are the head games on follow or asking to follow somebody? Because we talk about that with L.E. There's all these different rules about, "Okay." If they ask you to follow you and you don't let them follow, what would you say? Say you were going to follow somebody new that you went to school with, how would you do it?

McRae Acuff:

I would just request to follow them, but I could get my feelings hurt if they didn't follow me back. Because it could be like, "Hey, you're in my science class but you don't follow me back on Instagram." Ouch. There's a lot of opportunities for you to get your feelings hurt.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What would you say... And again, both feel free to comment, but McRae, let's start with you. One of the themes, subthemes largely because I keep bringing it up on this podcast that I follow, is I'm wondering about the world of real conversation. So let's say you follow somebody, they don't follow you back. Your feelings are hurt. I don't care what year you were born. And that's an awkward conversation, right? Just is. It was awkward for your dad. It was awkward for me, awkward for your mom. But there's an argument, a growing concern that because...

I'm asking you questions that might be a little bit hard to answer because you've only known a world with social media. It's not like your parents gave you a phone when you were three, but you've... All your formative years have been spent online. And your parents are great at conversation, I've known them for a long time, but do you find it's really the art of conversation with your friends, with your peers? It gets awkward to have those conversations in real life. You have to have them online or you don't have them at all and you just internalize those feelings or what goes on? Play out that scenario where somebody doesn't follow you. Is that something you would ever raise in person or what do you do with those feelings?

McRae Acuff:

I would never bring it up because that'd be so awkward, it'd be like, "Hey, Phil, I know you're in my science class and we know each other but you don't follow me back in Instagram. Ouch. Why do you do that?" I would never bring that up. But something that can be awkward is when someone only through social media, meeting them in person. Because you're like, "Oh I know you but I don't know. I know that last summer you went to the Bahamas but I don't actually know you." So sometimes that can be a little awkward five seconds while you're meeting them and being like, "Oh I recognize you but I've never met you before." But I wouldn't say conversation is haltered because all through... No one my age headphones to middle school. We communicated all through elementary school and learned those skills.

Jon Acuff:

You had some of that. But I would say Carey, what's interesting to me on this front is, L.E., my oldest daughter just rushed a sorority and she had a great experience. She went [inaudible 00:24:15], they were awesome. But what I didn't understand was that the girls that were rushing had to curate their Instagram because they were going to look. As they were getting selected for sororities, one of the first things they did was go back through feeds. There were kids eliminated based on their feeds. And so that's where you go. We know that happens job-wise. We've all heard stories where you walk into a job interview and they have a stack of printed out Instagram photos or whatever. But that it's at the sorority level, that's where you go. And then one of my favorite, funniest things about Gen Z is promposals are big, where they do this elaborate proposal. But what's funny to me is often the girl creates it and then gives it to the boy so that he can give it back to her and she can act surprised. So the girl-

Carey Nieuwhof:

McRae, you're shaking. You-

McRae Acuff:

She'll make the sign. It's crazy.

Jon Acuff:

She'll make the sign, an elaborate sign that clearly no 16-year old boy did a craft project and was like, "I'd love to play Scrabble at homecoming." And it's got Scrabble [inaudible 00:25:21]. They'll make it, they'll spend hours and hours then give it to some clueless dude and be like "Use this to propose to prom so that I can do a photo and be like, 'I can't believe he asked me to prom.'" That's crazy, dude.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You were rolling your eyes and shaking your head, McRae, not at your dad, but at the idea that girls are doing this for guys. What's your comment on that?

McRae Acuff:

I just think personally that the whole promposal thing, it's a little ridiculous. They're doing it for the gram, for the Instagram. I like it better back in time when people would be like, "Hey, do you want to go to prom with me?" And you just ask them and you don't have to update your Instagram story. I know it's thoughtful. It's thoughtful if a guy were to make someone a sign, but having a girl tell her friends what sign to make or her making the whole sign ruins the whole aspect of the sign.

Jon Acuff:

L.E. got asked to the prom and the guy made a sign and it was great. It wasn't elaborate and he actually made it. L.E. didn't make it. It's not like they're all bad. It's a silly thing when you put extra pressure on women to go, "Hey, not only do you have to be all these other things that we put on you society-wise, you also have to make an amazing prom sign to give to a lazy boy who's then going to get credit for making..." It's a weird thing, Carey. As a dad of daughters, adolescence is an onion and every layer I peel I'm like, "That's weird. That's even weirder." And I think some of this is Gen Z and some of it is social media.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Why Snapchat? I was surprised to find out how big that is and really... Obviously I think everybody's known... Nobody under 30 or 40 calls anybody anymore. Although I really enjoy my monthly phone call with your dad. That's a lot.

Jon Acuff:

Yeah, that's better than Snapchat. That would be a lot of snaps or whatever.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Jon and I, we connect the vote once a month by phone, which is awesome. I still like the phone. But we know nobody under 30 does that. I did not know that people, teenagers, don't text. What are the go-to messaging platforms and how does that work?

McRae Acuff:

I would say a lot of people text through Snapchat. Snapchat's basically the messaging app for teenagers. Or I'll talk to people through Instagram DM sometimes. Because that's a good way if I know someone but I don't have their phone number. It's an easy way to communicate. I would say I text very few people. I don't know. It's the old-person method of talking.

Jon Acuff:

It's like the Pony Express. Hey, hold on a second, Carey. Pause for a second. What's going on with the earphone?

McRae Acuff:

It's hurting my ear.

Jon Acuff:

Can you-

McRae Acuff:

It's hurting my ear. It's too loud or something. Do we have to have headphones?

Jon Acuff:

Yeah, we need headphones.

McRae Acuff:

We can just listen to it on the speaker.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You don't have to but it's better. But you can pop them out if they're giving you trouble.

McRae Acuff:

It's hurting my ear.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I can change the setting here. I don't want it to hurt your ear.

Jon Acuff:

No, no we're fine. We'll turn it down on our end. Just keep it in your ear.

McRae Acuff:

It hurts. The inside of my ear is sore.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Is that better?

Jon Acuff:

Do you want to switch ears?

McRae Acuff:

Sure.

This transcript was exported on Oct 24, 2022 - view latest version [here](#).

Jon Acuff:

No, it's not you Carey.

McRae Acuff:

It's my ear.

Carey Nieuwhof:

This is going to show up in IMDB. At the 23 minute mark of the conversation, they switched AirPods.

Jon Acuff:

She was touching it a thousand... Just keep it in there. I just thought it was your hair. Nuts. She's driving me nuts.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Things parents notice.

Jon Acuff:

Kept turning on and off.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Things parents notice.

Jon Acuff:

She kept turning on and off. It was falling out-

McRae Acuff:

I'm not turning it on and off.

Jon Acuff:

Every time you touched it, it would turn off. Yes.

McRae Acuff:

Oh.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Anything else about the world of social media that you think parents and leaders should know?

McRae Acuff:

Don't double post. Don't post more than one post on Instagram in a day.

Jon Acuff:

A day?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Sorry, a day? Where did that rule come from?

Jon Acuff:

That is made up.

McRae Acuff:

It's just unsaid, unspoken.

Jon Acuff:

There's no... I don't... I got a brand to grow. I'm going to going to Gary V the heck... You don't even know who that is, but I'm going to have to post a lot.

McRae Acuff:

And this is just personal.

Jon Acuff:

What's personal? Let's hear it.

McRae Acuff:

When you post in your story a lot, it's annoying. People that are constantly posting on their story. I get the occasional thing, but if you add seven things a day, it's annoying.

Jon Acuff:

I'm going to go more than that. [inaudible 00:29:34].

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, we're in trouble.

Jon Acuff:

I know, right, Carey?

Carey Nieuwhof:

A lot of us in trouble right now. I know. I'm doomed. If I look at it, I only got three things on my story. I'm like, "I didn't even work today."

Jon Acuff:

That's so true.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's crazy.

Jon Acuff:

Did I even do anything?

Carey Nieuwhof:

So what are the social consequences? Let's say you post twice a day on your Instagram and you do five stories. What happens?

McRae Acuff:

No monster's going to come after you. People just be like, "Oh, that's annoying." No one's going to say anything. It's just-

Jon Acuff:

But what would they think?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Jon Acuff:

What would they think? You're fully yourself-

McRae Acuff:

No, it's just like you're breaking the social norm. You post once a day. But it's okay if you have five things in your stories every now and then. It's just like if you post excessively every single day, people are like "Hmm."

Jon Acuff:

But Carey, there is... We talked about this in the book, L.E. had friends where they would post Thanksgiving carousels and be like "So thankful for all my friends" and do everybody but one person that sits at the table. And if you have six people at a table and five, you go, "Oh man."

Carey Nieuwhof:

So you become the excluded? Wow.

Jon Acuff:

Yeah. And you notice it. Because they had to pick specific photos and they're tagging everybody. Even if they forgot naturally. And that's the pressure on the person posting. Now the person posting is going, "Who could I possibly offend by leaving somebody out on this?" And again, Carey, what training do they get on social media? Zero. They don't have a class. There's no class in sixth grade that says, "Hey, in a year you're getting a phone. And by the way, you're a personal brand now because people are going to follow." There's no training.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's a really good point. Does anybody at school, other than your peers, any teachers, is there anything about, "Hey, here's what's happening with social media and this is what you should be..." No?

McRae Acuff:

No. Of course, we have the yearly no cyber bullying seminar. But they're not like, "These are the steps you can do to be a responsible person on social media." All the stuff they say is "Don't tell strangers your social security number. Be nice in the comments."

Jon Acuff:

No kid is doing... No, that's not what's going to screw them. That's not the problem, Carey. You never see reports of like, "Man, it's been terrible. There's been a lot of teens giving out their so..." They don't know their social security number. Get out of here. That is so out of touch.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, it's funny. You approach those assemblies with the same enthusiasm we did when we were in school too. It's like, "Oh, I got to go through these assemblies." It's funny. This is just a note. We have a lot of people who went to seminary listening to this podcast. But I remember when I was studying the New Testament in particular and the Old Testament too. There was this thing called Honor and Shame Culture. And it was portrayed like "2000 years ago people live by the virtues of honor and shame. And one of your jobs as a preacher is to help people who don't live in that culture understand that culture." Here's a reality. I think we're living in that culture again. There is so much honor and shame like, "Oh, I posted twice a day, but nobody taught me the code." Or "I wasn't tagged in the Thanksgiving photo." Or "I sat at the wrong table and got shunned." That is a hundred percent honor, shame.

I imagine it's a contributing factor for the anxiety that a lot of teens are dealing with. That's one of the subthemes. In Your New Playlist, I saw you and your sister, McRae, just tackle that again and again and again. And what you've tried to do and what I think you've done well is provide an antidote to that constant shaming "I'm not enough. I don't have it together. I'm a loser. My life is over." Talk about some of the antidotes, some of the... What's the word I'm looking for? Some of the remedies for that. What's kept you grounded? Because you really strike me in your writing and the time that we spent together, as you and your sister are both pretty grounded in reality.

McRae Acuff:

Probably I would say a big thing is realizing the ultimatums you may feel aren't true. A big one, we talked about it in the book is enough is a myth because you feel like "I'm never going to be pretty enough. I'm never going to be smart enough. I won't be happy enough." Or "I'll always feel this way" or "I'll always never... I'll always not have friends" or "I'll never fit in." There's lots of... People just say those. When I was doing research for the book, I would just listen and people would always say like, "Oh, I'm never going to pass this class." Realizing the ultimatums in your life, they're never going to be true. You just have to realize that "I may feel this way today, but tomorrow's a new day" and realizing that the ultimatums are lying to you.

Jon Acuff:

And I would say one thing that Crae wrote about was kind of her acronym. Jeeps. J-E-E-P-S. Crae, do you want to explain that?

Carey Nieuwhof:

That was really powerful actually.

McRae Acuff:

It was turndown techniques for stress and it was J is Jesus, E is exercise, E is eat, P is people, S is sleep. And it's just a way, "Oh if I'm feeling stressed about something, maybe I need to exercise or spend time with friends or go to bed early." And it's finding what works for you. Because some people are like, "Oh, I hate going to bed early," unlike myself or like "Oh, spending time with people is draining." You got to learn what parts of yourself... What is helpful to you.

Jon Acuff:

Yeah. It's personal. All the turndown techniques are personal. Crae when she's stressed will clean some part of her room. Because when things feel chaotic, you can get something back in order. So cleaning out your desk, there's something that's back in order. Where some kids would go, "That's the last thing I want to do when I feel like... If that's my turndown technique, I'm going to be more stressful." And it's the same with adults. It's figuring out, "Okay." Carey, cycling is one of your turndown techniques.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh totally.

Jon Acuff:

You love to cycle. For me, I love to run. Different people... And people listening to this right now would go, "Running is torture. That sounds miserable." Where for me it's something that I look forward to. And if I haven't done it for a week, I can tell based on the lack of endorphins.

Carey Nieuwhof:

There's a lot I want to cover. Couple questions still while we're talking about audience and everything. McRae, I'm curious, you've talked about some of the generation gap that exists even between you and your dad about jokes and dad humor and "No, people don't talk like that and people don't use punctuation," et cetera. But I'm thinking about all the adult communicators who are your dad's age, a bit younger or a bit older, who are actually trying to connect with your generation. Are there people you follow that you think are great at connecting with 16 year olds? Or is it "No, you just need another 16 year old to go and connect with a bunch of 16 year olds"? I'm just wondering, do you look... Is Taylor Swift old in your view?

McRae Acuff:

I wouldn't say I follow any influencers for teenagers, really. I'm not a big Instagram follow influencers person. And also I feel like when someone's like, "Oh, I want to be an influencer for teenagers," it's often super awkward. They're like, "Hey, buddies, let's talk about teenage life."

Jon Acuff:

Hold on a second. Hey, put it all the way in.

McRae Acuff:

It's all the way in my ear.

Jon Acuff:

I don't know how you're not fitting this incorrectly.

McRae Acuff:

I'm [inaudible 00:37:16]. It's in my ear.

Jon Acuff:

You have these headphones. You have your own headphones that are just like... This is driving me nuts, Carey.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I want to do the outtakes. These are brilliant.

Jon Acuff:

This is real life.

Carey Nieuwhof:

This is like every family.

Jon Acuff:

This is real life.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Real life with the Acuffs.

Jon Acuff:

But okay, so you asked the question-

Carey Nieuwhof:

[inaudible 00:37:31] there.

Jon Acuff:

You asked the question, Taylor Swift, what's-

McRae Acuff:

She's not old to me, but she's not my peer. I respect her and her music, but I'm not like, "Oh she's great at talking to teenagers."

Jon Acuff:

But who would you even... Do you even... That's an interesting thought, Carey. Who would you say is great at talking to teenagers?

McRae Acuff:

Other teenagers?

Jon Acuff:

Other teenagers.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay. That's where I wondered if this was going. Yeah.

McRae Acuff:

There's not like, "Oh, this influencer Sally is really in touch with the youngins." There's no one that's like... I don't know.

Jon Acuff:

[inaudible 00:38:06].

Carey Nieuwhof:

Because I'm thinking about it through the lens of church. You think everybody's got a student ministry and that kind of thing. Okay, you're shaking your head. Tell me what's in your brain.

McRae Acuff:

Everyone has that student pastor that's like, "Oh I'm going to change these students lives" and he throw us [inaudible 00:38:23] the lingo. I know someone that always talks about their inner vibes trying to be all teenagey. It's so cringy.

Jon Acuff:

So cringy. You are killing youth pastors right now.

McRae Acuff:

"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.

Jon Acuff:

That is probably the clip we pull from the whole-

Carey Nieuwhof:

There it is. That's the clip.

Jon Acuff:

She used colloquialism so good for her. I said it wrong. That's great.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So basically you want the 30 year old to be 30, the 45 year old to be 45 and the 57 year old to be 57?

McRae Acuff:

Yes.

Jon Acuff:

And you've benefited from that. Her small group leader had a baby. It would be weird if she acted like she wasn't a mom. She was young. She was like 28. She was way younger than me.

Carey Nieuwhof:

[inaudible 00:39:29] last night. Yeah.

Jon Acuff:

Yeah, yeah. I got a sitter for this dumb kid and I just hit the streets. You would be like, "What?" No. So I think that's part of what you're reacting to.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. And it's funny because we all have the ability now to connect with people. And so it's easy. And that's where imposter syndrome comes from when... The good news is, and I think that's true for your dad too. I feel like I get to wake up and be who I am every day, which is awesome. It's like [inaudible 00:39:59].

Jon Acuff:

I would say I do, but I have to fight to maintain that all day. I probably wake up-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, say more.

Jon Acuff:

I wake up the most honest that day, but then the entire rest of the day, Carey, you have invitations to be somebody else. There's "Oh, if I communicate a certain way on this idea" or "Oh, there's a podcast I want to be on and I want them to like me" or whatever it is. I wrote about that the other day. Interviewing Patrick Lencioni, I was tempted to try to impress him about me and that is an imitation out of authenticity. Then I'm trying to read him my resume, so he's like, "Oh wow, Jon, smart." Versus asking good questions on my podcast that serve the listeners. So I would say that yes, I get to use my voice, but I would say social media at least gives you plenty of opportunities to tweak your voice in a way that maybe you wouldn't normally talk. And I think that's true for teenagers. I think that's true for adults.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You and I have to pick up that thread because that is really interesting. I've been doing prep, I'm interviewing Chris Anderson from TED this week and I'm watching all of his interviews. But yeah, you're right underneath that is, "I don't want to come off as dumb and awkward when I'm interviewing Chris Anderson."

Jon Acuff:

You want to be a hundred percent Carey. You don't want to be the Chris Anderson version of Carey Nieuwhof and he's not asking-

Carey Nieuwhof:

No. And I don't want to be the under-researched version of Carey Nieuwhof either, right?

Jon Acuff:

No. That's the thing, is that... The way I say it is like there's finding your voice as a writer, but there's also keeping your voice. Because voice is one of the slipperiest things in the world. And I think that's true of podcasters. I think that's true of pastors. I think that's true of leaders. Every company in the world has had somebody they loved who then gets put in a leadership position and they think they have to now be a leader and they start talking to the people they used to be in relationship with in a different way, and that creates a disconnect. I think that's a human thing.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So true. One of the things I was surprised I didn't know, McRae, is you said you wrote a book as a teenager, which was one of your goals, which is awesome, but your friends don't read. Is that fair or don't buy books or what was that? What were you saying?

McRae Acuff:

I would say most of people [inaudible 00:42:17] going to a school, being in school, you're throwing all these books so students wouldn't choose to read. So they associate reading with, "Oh school, I have to annotate this book and all this stuff." And they don't fully grasp the joy of reading. It's not that they don't read, they just don't strive to read.

Jon Acuff:

And I would say that part of it is going how does a parent read this book first? That's my goal. I've said to every parent that I can talk to... And it's been fun. We had a principal buy 140 copies the other day. My goal with this book, Carey, is that mindset gets taught in high school in the same way that, for the last 20 years, financial education has been. 20 years ago, 30 years ago, we just had kids get credit cards at 25 and they were 30 grand in debt and didn't know how to handle it. Now freshman year, McRae takes personal finance. I think that's amazing. I think there should be a personal mindset class that every teenager takes. But we know that a parent's going to read it and hopefully read it first and go, "Oh wow, this creates a conversation for me."

Because the joke I sometimes do is no husband has ever read a book that a wife got him after hearing a sermon. There's not a husband in the world that the wife said, "Hey, I heard a sermon on rage, it reminded me of you. Here's the book and slides it to him on his nightstand." He's like, "Oh, thanks." That dude is never reading that book. And so we want this book to be given to a teenager in the smartest, kindest way. And I think that way is the parent reads it, it's a short read and then they start talking about

the concept of Soundtracks and then they introduce the book. Like that to me is not complicated, it's not difficult, versus "Hey, I heard this podcast, here's this book." And they throw it in the room and go like, "Hey, now you have to read." The kid would go, "What, am I being punished? What does that mean?" And so we are trying to help parents be smart about that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I think that's a really wise strategy. And I know these are super early days. Has the book even been out a month? I don't think so.

Jon Acuff:

No. It's only been out two weeks.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Two weeks. Maybe it's unanswerable. But I would love to know, McRae, what do you think the best way is to get this message, which I think is really important out to your peers? If you could wave a magic wand, do a TED Talk, start a podcast, Snapchat, Instagram, what is the best way to get the message out to your friends?

McRae Acuff:

Ultimately it's going to be the parents that buy the book. Because I can't think of the last time personally that I purchased a book. I'll go to a bookstore with him, but I'm never like, "Oh, I see this Amazon book, I'm going to buy it." But I think it'd be a good idea to parents to incentivize the book like, "Hey, you read this, here's \$20." Or if I say someone read it, they could recommend it. Because if someone recommends a book to me, I'm like, "Oh yeah, I'll read it." But if it's just some random book, I'm not going to be like, "Oh, maybe I'll read that."

Jon Acuff:

Yeah, Friend to friend, I've seen you read books. And then we've already had people Carey, it's only been out for two weeks. Parents are posting a picture with a \$20 bill at the back of the book, which was a joke we made in the book. But it's also, parents don't go to work expecting to do it for free. So if you were like, "Hey, I think this is important, I think this mindset will help you." Jenny and I incentivized McRae and L.E. to read. One summer we paid them X amount of dollars to read 15 different books that we didn't think they were reading in high school. And it was such a joy for me as a parent to see them at the neighborhood pool. Every other kid's on TikTok. McRae is reading-

McRae Acuff:

Scarlet Letter.

Jon Acuff:

Scarlet Letter or My Ántonia or Count of Monte Cristo or some C.S. Lewis. And it wasn't that I just gave them a good pep talk and was like, "You got to discover the joy of reading." That's not realistic. Instead we incentivize the type of behavior we would like for them to have. And then they fell in love with that. We would love to see that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

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Yeah. How did that feel for you? Were you grateful for that, McRae? Are you glad you read those books?

McRae Acuff:

Yeah. Maybe not Scarlet Letter.

Jon Acuff:

Well, and they could quit a book.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I haven't read that one either.

Jon Acuff:

They could quit a book. They both quit Catch 22, which I-

McRae Acuff:

Oh, so confusing. I was lost.

Jon Acuff:

I thought it was hilarious when I read it out college. But McRae was at the neighborhood pool, was just this frown on her face

McRae Acuff:

I was like "What is going on?"

Jon Acuff:

So we gave them the freedom to go "I'm out on this one."

McRae Acuff:

L.E. quit Scarlet Letter.

Jon Acuff:

Did you finish Scarlet Letter?

McRae Acuff:

Yes, I did. It was... Real page turner.

Jon Acuff:

Yeah. But was it you that said that about Taylor Swift?

McRae Acuff:

Oh, well, L.E., I think.

Jon Acuff:

One of them read it and was like, "Wait a second, there's a Taylor Swift lyric where she mentions the Scarlet Letter."

McRae Acuff:

She's like, "Where are Scarlet Letters"?

Jon Acuff:

Where are Scarlet Letters? She's like, "Is this from this?" We were like, "Yes. That's..." Taylor Swift didn't write that initial line in a song about a boy that dumped her. That's actually from work of literary-

McRae Acuff:

Or in one of her lyrics she makes reference to the Tale of Two Cities "Best of times, worse of times." I'm like, "Oh, she stole that from Charles Dickens."

Jon Acuff:

Exactly.

Carey Nieuwhof:

She did. It's the opening line. You didn't even have to read to page two on that one to get that.

Jon Acuff:

You get that one early.

Carey Nieuwhof:

No, I think that's a really good... If I was reparenting, which I'm not, but we could go back 15 years, I would probably pay my kids to read certain books. I think that's a great... Because you pay them to mow the lawn, wash the car, why wouldn't you pay them to read the book?

Jon Acuff:

And what's going to serve them long term, washing the car or... Because the ACT, at least here in America, the ACT is one of our big standardized tests and it's mostly reading. I don't have to guess the thread between getting them to read and them doing really well on one of the most important tests they'll take in high school. And that's the other thing with parenting is, Carey, we always encourage parents to be creative. Be creative with your kids. That doesn't mean you have to be silly, doesn't mean you have to be whimsical if you're not a whimsical person, whatever. But try to be creative, try to get involved that way. And social media, we talked a lot about the negatives, but one of the positives is, Crae sends me funny videos on Instagram. L.E. sends me funny... That's part of our interaction. L.E.'s at school right now. Carey, a lot of people, a lot of parents are loving the BeReal social media platform. I don't know if [inaudible 00:48:45] that one yet?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. I just joined it the other day.

Jon Acuff:

Because you can see what your kid is doing at college. I've had so many parents go, "I love it because on a random Tuesday at 1:30 PM I can say, 'Oh there's my daughter out in the quad.' Or 'There's my son in the cafeteria.'" And so I think there's... Even though there's a lot of dangers, there's also a lot of really neat connection that I know that we've benefited from.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What are the upsides of social for you, McRae?

McRae Acuff:

I would say friends that I may have met at camp or have moved away, it's really easy for me to stay in touch with them. I could be like, "Oh look, there's them at the beach" or whatever. And so it's a cool way to... If I didn't have any sort of social media, I'm not individually text and reach out to all these people, but it's a nice way to keep in contact.

Jon Acuff:

You wouldn't write letters. She wouldn't like... The friend who moved to the Outer Banks, you wouldn't write them. Be like, "Dad, I need a stamp." And so-

McRae Acuff:

For Sarah.

Jon Acuff:

Yeah, exactly. I think that's one of them. What are some other benefits for you with social media?

McRae Acuff:

I would just say it's a great way to communicate. You can be really creative. You can learn new things. We just had dinner from an Instagram recipe. It's a really cool way to communicate.

Jon Acuff:

Yeah, we did. Your mom made this amazing pasta meal and we were like, "Where'd you get this recipe?" And she was "Instagram." And we were like "For the win. Way to go Instagram." And also McRae has an art account, she has her personal account, but then she also has an art account where she shares works of art she's doing. I think that's great practice as a kid to go, "I'm going to spend a couple years building up something I'm passionate about" and understand what does it look like to share that with an audience. That's a great practice.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It seems to me, listening to different interviews you've done with L.E. and McRae and knowing you as I have Jon, you guys have a pretty healthy family vibe. I'm sure you have your moments. Maybe AirPods get in the way from time to time. I don't know.

Jon Acuff:

We've fought about headphones this entire podcast. Listen to the outtakes because that's as real as it gets.

Carey Nieuwhof:

We may put them in [inaudible 00:50:48] I don't know. Okay, go ahead, McRae. You're very expressive. I like that.

McRae Acuff:

One of the podcast we've been on is like, "Oh you guys are the perfect family. You've written a book together. I bet you just sit down-"

Jon Acuff:

Are they British in the story?

McRae Acuff:

"Sit down and talk about mindset at the dinner table." They have an unrealistic expectation of what our family life is like.

Jon Acuff:

Yeah. Because our family life is real. There's arguments, there's-

McRae Acuff:

Disagreements.

Jon Acuff:

People get grounded. Some people-

Carey Nieuwhof:

What did you disagree with over the book?

McRae Acuff:

A lot of the dad jokes he tried to slide in. Some of the vocabulary, but this is just a tidbit. When we first got the cover art, it was like Jon Acuff with L.E. and McRae.

Jon Acuff:

They didn't like the font.

McRae Acuff:

We're like, "Hey, I wrote this book, why am I in 0.4 font?"

Jon Acuff:

Yeah, that's true. And I said, "I didn't design the cover."

McRae Acuff:

I'm like, "Do something about it."

Jon Acuff:

Yeah, that was funny. We did get an argument. We got an argument over that. But also Carey, there was, for me as a dad going, "Okay, I don't want to tell any stories that..." McRae's still in high school. You had to be smart about, "Could this be misinterpreted by somebody? Is this a story that won't serve you well as a junior in high school." She's still in the high school, so we tried to make sure that it was full and vulnerable and honest. But also recognizing she's a 16 year old girl. How does that look like for her to create... In the same way that if you worked at a company and then wrote a book about working at companies. You wouldn't be like, "There's a guy named Jeff. I hate that guy." And then Jeff would be like, "Carey, what are you doing?"

Carey Nieuwhof:

"You never told me."

Jon Acuff:

"You never told me. I saw your book. And I had no idea." I think we tried to be careful with that. But Carey, I think... Jenny's not on this podcast, but so much of this starts with conversations Jenny and I have, where we do... Crae, what are some of our family soundtracks, would you say?

McRae Acuff:

We would say "Early is on time." We're excessively early to places.

Jon Acuff:

Excessively [inaudible 00:53:04].

Carey Nieuwhof:

Excessively early.

McRae Acuff:

We live in PTSD from Atlanta because it would take you 45 minutes to an hour to get somewhere. And I remember once we had a friend singing at a church and it was at 9:30 and we left at 8:50 and we're sitting in the parking lot at 9:01.

Jon Acuff:

Because Nashville's small. So "Early is on time" is one of them. What about middle campers?

McRae Acuff:

Don't be middle camper. At campsite there's campsite, campsite and then there's one in the middle where it's the people that show up late with 37 kids, that ride bikes at 6:00 AM and never set up a tent.

Jon Acuff:

Well, and a loop, at a campsite, Carey, there's the loop on the lake. There's 20 sites that are on the water. And then in the middle, which is essentially a parking lot is a middle campsite with no access to water, no view. You might as well be in a Walmart parking lot. It's not... And so we joke about, "How do you be prepared? So you're not a middle camper." The way you do is that you say, "Let's plan, let's be

detailed, let's be organized." So we joke about "Okay, what [inaudible 00:54:13]..." We of approach that middle camper style. "So now next year let's be a little more deliberate" or "Let's be a little more thoughtful in how we do things."

I think every family develops shorthand. For us, they become soundtracks. And one is like "Everything's always working out for me." Today I... And that was one I learned from a guy named James Victory, when McRae's car broke down last Wednesday and we thought it was dead. We thought it had blown a rod. The engine was ruined. It was something small, cost \$200. And when Jenny told me, I was like, "Well?" She goes "Because everything's always working out for us." We are really deliberate about positivity. We're really not enough-

Carey Nieuwhof:

You are super positive.

Jon Acuff:

But I'm a negative person by nature. I have to work my butt off for that. I don't wake up in the morning and think that. We're careful about the words we say to each other, the words we say about events, the words we say about opportunities and challenges. I think we try to be positive while at the same time being realistic.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Was it L.E. who was with you at the GLS in Chicago in August, Jon?

Jon Acuff:

Yep. Yeah, you got to meet L.E.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, I got to meet L.E. And we were chatting a little bit. Both L.E. and you McRae were talking about interviews and how some of them were so boring. She didn't do the British accent by the way, which was quite entertaining. But I'm just going to say, you've been on a lot of interviews for this. This probably just feels like just another one. What is one question nobody's asked you that you wish somebody would ask you or a subject that nobody has touched on that you're like, "Why don't you go here?"

McRae Acuff:

No one asked us about the audiobook process, which I think's funny. No one's like, "Oh, so you wrote the book. So you voiced the audiobook. How was that? What was that like?" No one really asked about which stories... Like "Why did you choose which stories you put in the book," really.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Let's go there. Why did you choose the stories you chose for the book?

McRae Acuff:

I think we took stories, the lacrosse story and the swimmer story. And we had thought of other stories, but we chose the ones with the most impact and most related [inaudible 00:56:26]. That's not a word.

Jon Acuff:

Relatability?

McRae Acuff:

Relatability. And we'd be like, "Oh this is a good story, but it only fits the teenage girl narrative. What's something more universal?" We tried to think of stories that would be more applicable.

Jon Acuff:

I think they learned about balancing for an audience. So going, "How do we write a book that's not just for teenage girls but it's for teenagers? How do we write a book that goes from preteen all the way up to first year, second year college? What does it look like for us to address things for a wide audience?" And then the audiobook process. If you listen to the audiobook, I'm in it maybe 20 minutes of probably five hours. And so it was McRae, it was L.E. I think what they learned too, Carey, was... What I learned from the process was that... The thing I think about the most was that teenagers and even kids as young as nine think it's too late. They already think it's too late for them. Because L.E. Told me that when she was nine, I didn't know this, she tried out for the swim team and she felt it was too late to do swim because everybody else had been doing it since they were five.

I know that you and I meet people every day that go, "Carey, I'd love to start a podcast but it's too late." And you go, "What? If you're breathing, it's not too late." We know that. But I had no idea that there's a nine year old out there that goes, "It's too late for me." So that's what I learned. I think what they learned is the behind the scenes of serving an audience, of creating content, of structuring an idea and then also all the work that goes into it. That there are podcasts, that there are meetings about covers, that there... We signed 2000 book plates and so they... That's a lot of book plates. That was a task they had to do. I think that they got to learn a lot of the process that goes into creating a message.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What did you love about-

Jon Acuff:

And it's fun. Oh, go ahead.

Carey Nieuwhof:

No, go. Go, Jon.

Jon Acuff:

I was just going to say what's fun is that they're already getting speaking requests. We did a book signing event together and they're already starting to get speaking requests, which I think is super fun. I'm not going to put any pressure on that. If they want to do it, awesome. If they don't want to do it, awesome. But I think that's neat. But what question were you going to ask Carey?

Carey Nieuwhof:

I was going to ask about the audiobook process.

McRae Acuff:

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It was so challenging because you're just in this little bitty silent room and you can hear yourself in these headphones and you think you say words regularly and then you say Netflix over and over or there's a guy in our book named Bochelli and for some reason I thought it was Brochelli.

Jon Acuff:

So she said Brochelli-

McRae Acuff:

That's a better name.

Jon Acuff:

15 times.

McRae Acuff:

Yeah.

Jon Acuff:

It was.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And then you had to overdub or redo it?

McRae Acuff:

Had to keep doing it. And then we had to cut out in this one part, you name the longest Norwegian town name. I'm like, "I can't. That's 37 letters."

Jon Acuff:

We did a joke with... That every kid feels a certain way. And then I named a bunch of towns in this joke and then I named... I looked up the longest town name in Norway, which was 47 consonants. Just absurd. And so I put that in the book and then it fell on McRae to read.

McRae Acuff:

And I was like "Uh-oh."

Jon Acuff:

We edited that. We just cut that. I was like, "That is no..." Because we are going to be in there for an hour trying to say-

McRae Acuff:

[inaudible 00:59:53].

Jon Acuff:

Yeah, it wouldn't have been worth it. The ROI. they learned about ROI. In a moment like that, you do the ROI and go, "That joke's not going to earn us any more money. So it's out. It's out. It's going to cost us a lot of time. Not going to help anybody get it out."

Carey Nieuwhof:

All right. This is your opportunity Before we wrap up. Anything else that nobody has asked you about? This is the podcast where you can say it, McRae. Doesn't have to be boring.

McRae Acuff:

I don't know. I think we basically-

Jon Acuff:

What's your favorite symbol? Because we talk about how powerful symbols are to remind you of something true. It can be something small for you. I'm going to-

Carey Nieuwhof:

There goes that there.

Jon Acuff:

She wears AirPods all day, dude.

Carey Nieuwhof:

This is the best illustration of the parent-child dynamic because I'm watching you guys this whole interview. I have not noticed the AirPods thing. And you said "McRae, you've been touching that thing the entire interview."

Jon Acuff:

She's touched it a thousand times, dude.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But I didn't notice. I didn't notice. I'm like, "Oh, she's moving her hair back or something." It didn't bother me at all. And you're losing it.

Jon Acuff:

I wouldn't be bothered Carey if I was asking her to wear something every teenager doesn't wear every day all day. It's not like this is their first experience with an AirPods on. So funny.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh that's funny. Anyway. McRae, it's totally cool. That's fine.

Jon Acuff:

I can already see it popping out, right now.

McRae Acuff:

I don't know why. These are weird, I guess.

Carey Nieuwhof:

My wife has the same thing. It's probably that your ear canal size is different. They have small, medium, large.

McRae Acuff:

Maybe have a different thingy on, the plastic.

Jon Acuff:

I have a large head Carey, so it could be that. I really do. It's-

Carey Nieuwhof:

I have a gigantic head.

Jon Acuff:

I have a gigantic, dude. I bet my head is bigger than yours. It's just gigantic. I don't know how you measure things in Canada. Maybe your head is four stones or I don't know what you guys do.

Carey Nieuwhof:

In metric it's huge.

Jon Acuff:

Yeah. Centimeters. I don't even know [inaudible 01:01:49].

Carey Nieuwhof:

Huge in metric. 10 million centimeters.

Jon Acuff:

I don't know what to do with that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I don't even know where we were going with this.

Jon Acuff:

So Carey, we were saying the symbols.

Carey Nieuwhof:

[inaudible 01:01:57]. Oh yeah, symbols.

Jon Acuff:

Like "What's a symbol?"

McRae Acuff:

I think my favorite symbol is I have a trunk and when I was 13 I went to a summer camp that most girls have been going to since they were six. And it's just a symbol of like "I'm brave enough to try new things." And I like it because it's very visual and I see it a million times a day and it's very... It's covered with stickers, which I think is fun. And that's what my favorite symbol-

Jon Acuff:

Yeah, I think that's something that is really fun for me as a dad. You know how you learn from your kids? McRae is brave that way, because there's a lot of kids... To the too late, we just said too late. So this is full circle. There's a lot of kids that would've said "It's too late to go to this camp. Everybody starts in kindergarten and I'm not going to go in sixth grade, seventh grade, eighth grade, whatever." And McRae is a throw-herself-in kid. And I as a dad, that encourages me to be brave. So I get to watch her go. Oh she just... Think of how many times adults don't try new things or we are resistant to change. Where you think about your kid going, "I'll go sleep in North Carolina in the woods, in the camp for two weeks with people I've never met." That's amazing.

The joke we always do, which you could probably do yourself because you've heard me do it so many times, is that we ask kids to be braver than we are in that we drop them off at 7:00 in a field and go, "There's your new soccer coach, here's your new sport you've never played. Go on, go do it." Where I, if my wife says to me, "Hey, do you want to go to a dinner party?" I'm like, "Who's going to be there? Which of my friends are going to be there? How long are we going to stay? When can we leave? Will they have a dog I can pet?" That's a dinner party.

And the other thing I say is, kids, if you think about school, their boss changes every year. Their responsibilities change. Their job changes every year. You've never had a 12-month period in your life, Carey, where you got a new boss, a new job, 12 years in a row. And so I think as a parent, if you can reframe it that way, it gives you empathy, it gives you patience. It also gives you inspiration of like "Look how brave my kids are being." So when McRae got cut from lacrosse, she didn't stop. She just tried cross-country. She joined the cross-country team. So that's fun for me. I've joked about her AirPods coming out, but at the end of the day, Crae is incredibly brave and incredibly willing to throw herself into stuff. And I think that comes through in the book.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I don't know what the stats are, but the number of 16 year olds who have written and published a book, really, really small. That's got to be 0.001%. Congratulations.

McRae Acuff:

Thank you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I'm really excited for you. And the whole AirPods thing just made it real at the end of the day, didn't it? It's a real family.

Jon Acuff:

You're going to have to... Your editor can decide which of those, because there's probably four-

Carey Nieuwhof:

I think some of it, it's going to have to stay in.

Jon Acuff:

The funniest one will, maybe the last one will have to stay.

Carey Nieuwhof:

The last one will stay in. But we got to leave a little bit of the wrangling.

Jon Acuff:

Your reviews on this episode are going to be like "That guy's so mean about AirPods." I promise you-

Carey Nieuwhof:

I think it was funny because what parent hasn't been there and what kid... Because you started McRae talking about your dad jokes. Jon's dad jokes aren't funny and this didn't work out and that didn't work out. You're keeping it real. And we'll save... I have lots of friends in England, lots of UK listeners, but we'll keep the British accent for the next one. Okay? Thanks for being real.

Jon Acuff:

Yep. Yeah, please.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Thanks for showing up as the real Acuffs and congratulations on the book. Last thing, just to encourage you, McRae, if you got those speaking requests and they're in front of high school or youth groups or students, all that, I wonder if that's going to be one of the best ways that you can bring this message to your friends, to your generation. I think when you get up there and you talk about it with your real life, that'll be really, really compelling.

McRae Acuff:

Thanks. Teenagers want to listen to teenagers

Jon Acuff:

Yeah. What did she say tonight? She said "Teenager." You said, "Who are the teen voices you'd like to hear from?" And she said "Other teenagers." And we were both "Ruh-roh. Okay."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Expect a lot of invites after this. We so appreciate it. Hey, people want to find the book. It's available. It's a major publisher. It's Baker. It's everywhere books are sold. But where can they find you? We know on Snapchat, but you don't want 10,000 requests from... No, you don't want that. You don't want people to follow you on Instagram, there must be a website for the book.

Jon Acuff:

Yeah, acuff.me/playlist. So A-C-U-F-F.

Carey Nieuwhof:

They can follow you, Jon?

Jon Acuff:

Yeah, they can follow-

Carey Nieuwhof:

[inaudible 01:06:25].

Jon Acuff:

I'm easy to find. But acuff.me/playlist is where you can go read the first two chapters for free. And I have a podcast called All It Takes Is A Goal where I interview people about the goals they're working on.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Such a great podcast.

Jon Acuff:

Thanks, Carey.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And that's another one too. Okay, one more bonus round. This is it. School night. You started a podcast. I remember we talked about that at the time and then it didn't go the way you wanted and you could have easily said "Too late," but then you launched All It Takes Is A Goal and its exploded, dude. Way to go.

Jon Acuff:

My first one was terrible as your first anything should be terrible. We put that in the new book, that "Be brave enough to be bad at something new." I think, yeah, the first podcast... One of the things I say is "It'll be a success or a story. It'll either win or I'll get a story." And so I got a story out of the first podcast. I didn't have a mic, Carey, I would just record. And I'd have friends very lovingly say, they'd email me, be like, "Hey buddy, you ever think about buying a mic? They sell them."

Carey Nieuwhof:

You think I one of those friends maybe?

Jon Acuff:

Yeah, exactly. Who [inaudible 01:07:35].

Carey Nieuwhof:

I remember that. I'm like, "Oh, I need to go buy Jon a mic."

Jon Acuff:

I'd be like, "What are you talking about? I'm just going to scream into my laptop and hope that magically gets fixed on the podcast." For me, that's one of those things, I love looking ahead to you and your podcast and what you've done. And that's why we talk once a month because we really enjoy each other

and we really get to learning from each other. Just like there's not a million people that have written at 16 year old book. There's not a million people that I go, "Man, I want to figure that out."

The thing I say about you Carey, and the thing I say about leaders I look up to, is that fruit is loud. When you find somebody, you go, "Okay, do they have the kind of life I want to have? The type of marriage, the type of business type of leadership." And you'll be able to tell because fruit is loud, the fruit of their life will be loud. And so for me, that's what's fun. I know I can bring my daughter on a podcast like this because you're going to be a kind, gracious, prepared host who loves my family, and I can look at you and go, "You and Tony have the kind of relationship I want. You have the kind of relationship with your kids 10 years ahead of me." Fruit is loud.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And I got to say, McRae, too. When I've talked to you, when I read the book, when I've heard you on other podcasts, I'm like, "Oh man, I've got goals now too for my family." My kids are about a decade older than you and your sister are. But I'll tell you, it's fantastic. So you got a good thing going and thanks for sharing with lots and lots of leaders today. Really appreciate-

Jon Acuff:

Yeah, thanks for having us, Carey.

McRae Acuff:

Thank you for having us.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, you're welcome.

Told you it was going to be fun. Isn't that awesome? Hat's off to McRae for writing her first book, her sister L.E, and for the Acuffs for being able to pull that off. That's really, really cool. Make sure you check out everything in the show notes. It's careynieuwhof.com/episode530. We have also got transcripts for you at that same link, careynieuwhof.com/episode530, if you want to dig a little bit deeper.

Today's episode is brought to you by the Art of Leadership Academy, Art of Church Growth. Get instant access to my course, The Art of Church Growth today, and finish this year on a high note. Go to theartofchurchgrowthcourse.com. And meet a practical need for child in poverty this holiday season, simply go to compassion.com/givingtree/carey and you can partner with them. I'll tell you, so many people are going to win when you do that.

So next episode, we've got Nancy Duarte. She returns to the podcast. Man, we talk about four trends in communication. She has worked with some of the world's best communicators. You're going to get a goldmine of information from her. Going to talk about the power of curation, something I have been thinking about a lot. And also what she learned from coaching Apple and Steve Jobs. Here is an excerpt.

Nancy Duarte:

I just actually was talking to someone yesterday and they were saying that one of the things that's going to happen is people really, really need to get into audio. They need to figure that out. And it's going to eventually be coupled with VR audio. Even the way... I don't know if you've got the new earbuds, but they have surround sound now. I was listening to a podcast, I'm walking and it was a commercial, but it went shh right behind me and I jumped. I thought there was a person right behind me saying shh. And

I'm [inaudible 01:10:55] like "What's going on?" I jumped out of my skin. There's real beauty and artistry that's happening, but it's becoming what I would call these interactive podcasts versus these one way, which preachers tend to do.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Also coming up, Rich Birch, Pat Lencioni, James Clear, Chris Anderson, Annie F. Downs, and so much more. If you subscribe, you will never miss an episode. And if you enjoyed this episode, please not only subscribe, but maybe leave us a rating and review. It really helps us get the word out. I'm so thankful for everything that you do to share this show. Every year gets better and that's because of you. If you like this episode, I want to give you something for free. You can register for my church, the Art of Church Growth before the end of the day on November 2nd, and you'll get the Christmas Outreach Toolkit absolutely free, that outlines the simple steps you can take to make Christmas your best one yet.

Let me just say something more about that. It's something I developed early on and I realized, "Wait a minute, Christmas is a special time of year." Not only because it's cool holiday, but because all kinds of people show up at church that wouldn't normally show up. Well, what if you leverage that? What if you put kerosene on that and just lit it on fire? I think there's a great way that you can reach more people this Christmas than ever. It's not too late. Get it all. Go to theartofchurchgrowthcourse.com. You'll get the free bonus Christmas Outreach Toolkit if you act now. Go to theartofchurchgrowthcourse.com.

Thanks so much for listening everybody. We will be back next time with a fresh episode, and I hope our time together today helped you thrive in life and leadership.