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Announcer: The Art of Leadership Network.

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Carey Nieuwhof: Welcome to the Carey Nieuwhof Leadership Podcast, it's Carey here. I hope our time together today helps you thrive in life and leadership. We've got GrubHub founder, Mike Evans, on the podcast today, and my goodness. So many of you have started things, I think you're going to love this. Or you're trying to get something started, it's going to be a great conversation. Today's episode is brought to you by Belay; great leaders delegate, and you can get your free delegation guide by texting CAREY to 55123 to get back to what you love doing best, which is leading. And by Overflow. What if every dollar donated to your church could go further toward your mission? Overflow offers the lowest Cash Processing fees in the industry. Go to overflow.co/carey

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Well, Mike Evans had an idea of doing online ordering back in the day and he started this little company called GrubHub. And we talked about startups, dead-ends, scaling to a 2.6 billion dollar IPO, there are lessons there for all of us, and how to win when you're not first to market.

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So, a little bit more about Mike Evans. He started GrubHub in his spare bedroom, grew it into a multi-billion dollar online food delivery colossus that became a household name. After leaving GrubHub post-IPO, he punted it all aside to ride his bike across the U.S., he wrote a book about the startup journey and the bike ride called *Hangry: A Startup Journey*, it came out last year. More recently, Mike founded fixer.com.

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We talk about that, an on-demand handy person B Corp that trains its employees from scratch. He's passionate about professional and personal vision, a strong proponent of impact businesses, for-profit companies that use their power to bring about positive social change.

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This is a fascinating conversation. So I hope you enjoy it. And if you've ever as a leader said, you know,

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Well, now my conversation with Mike Evans, the founder of GrubHub.

Carey Nieuwhof: Mike, welcome to the podcast.

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Mike Evans: Thanks for having me. It's great to be here.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well it's great to connect, and you transformed grub hub from a startup into a multibillion-dollar business and IPO, which is pretty incredible. But your training is as a coder, right? MIT grad. So you're a coder. I would love to know. I've got a son, who's a coder. So this is a little bit selfish. He's a software engineer. Did your coding background help or hurt you as a business leader?

Mike Evans: Well it helped a lot in the early days. And the reason was that you know, one of the main points of the book is, "start the thing that you want to do." Start being the change you want to see in the world, start the business that you want to start. For me, that was easier because I could write the software myself. I didn't have to raise capital to go hire a software developer.

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So I could start it myself, and then I had direct control over what I was writing. So when I was selling restaurants by day, when they would give me feedback about what they wanted from the product, I could literally write that, code that up in the evening. So the feedback loop was so tight in the early days that it really helped, mostly. Sometimes that sent me off on rabbit trails because I was a little too quick to listen to just one customer as opposed to my customers holistically. So, mostly it helped

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, and I think a lot of leaders start there, right? We have a skill set and we're very good. I remember, when I started in ministry, you know, I did the graphic design. I was a terrible graphic designer, but I did it anyway. You're sort of a jack of all trades, master of none. Although, arguably, if you're an MIT grad, you've probably mastered coding and you'd worked on it for a year.

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At what point did you realize that your ability to work in the business was becoming a liability? Like, you needed to start working on it.

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Mike Evans: Yeah, I remember there was one day in particular where I am having a lot of trouble with my initial sales. A lot of trouble signing up restaurants to start. I was not good at sales, I ended up getting Sales for Dummies book and that turned out to be pretty helpful because there was such a huge gap between my confidence and the basics that it really helped. But there was a day that I avoided doing the work I needed to do but was bad at, and instead did the work that I didn't need to do but was good at, which was software development. And I spent eight hours doing it and I felt great at the end of it, and then I had a moment where I was like, that was a waste of a day, like I feel good but I did not move forward on my goals at all.

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Carey Nieuwhof: Wow. Okay. I think you just called the card of a lot of leaders. It's like, I know what I should be doing, but I really wanna write the sermon. I really want to prepare for this court case, I really want to... And we get into our little rabbit hole niche, and we ignore what we know we should have done had the difficult conversation with a coworker, work on a strategic vision statement, or whatever. That's good self-awareness.

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Mike Evans: It goes both ways. Because we're human, too. So if we set ourselves up for a schedule where we only do the things we hate all day, it just gets hard to work at all.. So, what I do is, I practiced this thing where I have, for instance, my email inbox. I have these sticky emails, things that are going to take some time and attention that I don't really want to deal with.

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And I'll do one of them to start the day. I won't spend three hours on it, but I'll spend 15 minutes doing the hard things to start a day. And then I'll move on to the things that I enjoy a little bit more. But starting with a little bit of difficulty and then recognizing that, you can't do it all the time. That's been a helpful sort of practice, for me. It's not all the way. It's not dogmatically doing the hard thing. Neithe, is it completely, like in a cowardly way, avoiding the hard things.

Carey Nieuwhof: You also, looking at origin stories, which always fascinates me. You were raised by a single mom in what we might call a not very middle-class background, is that fair?

Mike Evans: Yeah. My mom struggled. Had a couple jobs, four kids, single mom, growing up in what at the time was rural Georgia. Although now is just Suburbia.

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Yeah, I mean that was formative. I'm saying my formative years were formative. Like yeah, of course they were. But um, yeah, I mean I think that that influenced things like later on, when I was starting this, I had a ton of school debt and I was very, you know, I didn't buy ink cartridges for my printer. I bought a tank of ink and uses the syringe to refill them.

Carey Nieuwhof: I may have done that once or twice in the early days. Yeah I remember that .So you were very Thrifty.

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Mike Evans: Yeah, I mean Warren Buffett says this, “watch the small expenses,” right? And so how do you decide when you want to be strategic and spend the money on something, and spend your time instead on the things that are valuable? And when do you do the cheap thing? When you do the frugal thing and put a little effort in? Really, it comes down to what's your scarcest resource? And, typically, it's not money. Typically it's time, although I've come to believe that actually even more scarce than time is attention, and they're subtly different. You can spend not that much time on something, but if it's the thing that's keeping you up at night, and it's taking a lot of your attention, you're spending a lot of mental energy on it, even if you're actually not spending much time on it. And so sometimes you have to limit just the number of things that take up your attention, even. And so early in the business I had a medium amount of time, medium amount of attention, and no money. And so I did the frugal things.

Carey Nieuwhof: How else did your mom shape you?

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Mike Evans: Well, certainly,she had me going to church like three times a week, so you know, grew up in a pretty charismatic environment in rural Georgia.

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And yeah, I mean, her faith certainly shaped me.

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She was hard-working, and she never gave up on things. I mean, she raised four kids, and really sacrificed a lot of her personal, whatever, aside from the kids, she wasn't doing a lot of other things. And so, seeing her invest that much in us really. It

was meaningful and it comes with an obligation as well, to repay that, to make the world a better place. In whatever way that means, as a result of her investment me.

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Carey Nieuwhof: So take us through the origin story. I mean, I think most people, particularly in North America, would be familiar with GrubHub. It became this huge huge company, but you started out at MIT as a coder and that was a job that you're pretty transparent in your book, *Hangry*, and you're like, you hated work. You just hated it. So talk about that tension because there's more than a few people listening who hate their jobs.

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Mike Evans: I liked the work, and I had a great manager. I hated being employed. That was the part that was really hard. I have a pathology where I don't like people telling me what to do, which is a fairly common pathology among entrepreneurs, right?

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Coding for someone else, towards the goal or mission for a company that, at the time I didn't even know what the mission of the company was, let alone did my life and my values align with it. And it's just really hard to go to work every day if you don't know what it is that the company that you're working for, or the organization you're working for, represents. You don't know what their goals are. Not everybody has that challenge. But, I certainly had that challenge, that really bothered me to not know that, to the point where the only way I can really know what the mission of this company is, is if I create it, if I make it. And so I was the software developer. I was working for other people. I was sick of my job, and then I had this idea.

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I was looking for some kind of company to start. I wanted to do something. It just was very apparent to me that calling restaurants on the phone was hard. And that's not a thing that was apparent. It's still not apparent to a lot of people. I see this online, a lot. Well, "I don't see why you don't just call the restaurant," and I want to pull my hair out when I hear that statement, because it's like, you can call the restaurant and get put on hold, and then read your credit card over the phone and then have the order mis-transcribed. And then sometimes it does or doesn't show up. Like, that's a terrible experience and to the point where usually, when you say, who wants to call the restaurant, everybody says not it, right? Nobody wants to do it. And so ultimately, you know, I went from not wanting a job, to figuring out how to

make an advertising service for restaurants, and then it took actually about a year and a half to two years, to doing online ordering for restaurants.

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And in the meantime, I signed up around two or three hundred restaurants over the course of those two years and I was making enough money. I started to be able to hire people and that's how I started. It bootstrapped. I didn't get investors or anything. It just started through, sort of organically, me trying to solve a problem for myself.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah you had a few iterations though. It wasn't like one day, I think the iconic story, there's a pizza on the cover of your book, or an illustration of pizza, right? You wanted a pizza, it was really difficult to order, but it's not like you got it right, right out of the gate, what were some of the different iterations? The dead-ends that you hit when you were conceptualizing what would become GrubHub?

Mike Evans: So originally, it was just an advertising service and I couldn't sign restaurants up. I was having the hardest time signing them up for a hundred bucks.

Carey Nieuwhof: When you say advertising service, what do you mean, like internet advertising?

Mike Evans: It was online. It was internet. We published restaurant's menus online.

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Carey Nieuwhof: And this was what year? Let's date it.

Mike Evans: This is 2002.

Carey Nieuwhof: So if you're a young listener, this was pretty radical back in 2002. We didn't even really have Facebook then.

Mike Evans: Right. You could not see. This was actually before MySpace. This was in Friendster territory. Way back in the Dark Ages. Let me tell you about the dark ages of the internet. So, way back in 2002, you couldn't find the menus for restaurants online. There was no concept of user-generated content. People didn't upload these things. You couldn't find them anywhere. And so the original version was, I was just taking menus and putting them online. There was no online ordering. There was nothing.

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I couldn't sign restaurants up because I was trying to sell advertising. I was trying to sell premium placement, for \$100 bucks a month, right? And it was just really hard, and the first big unlock, the thing that made the business go from, "I can't do it," to "I can do it," turned out to later on be a dead end. And so there's a lesson here, like, sometimes the things that are good for a time are not necessarily things that are good in the long term. And the thing that unlocked signing up restaurants was phone ordering. So I built, because I was an engineer, I built a telecom server where calls would come into our server, and then they would get forwarded on to the restaurant, and we could track them.

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And so we charged on a per-order basis for the phone calls that were coming through the website. And that allowed me to start setting up restaurants really rapidly.

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Later on, that became a real liability. Because we were addicted to the revenue from the phone system, because it was still, it was significant. I mean when you're making a \$100 million dollars a year, \$10 million dollars of that was coming through the phone system.

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Carey Nieuwhof: That was your VOIP Innovation, right? Do you want to explain that a little bit, Voice Over Internet Protocol?

Mike Evans Do you want me to get into the technical details?

Carey Nieuwhof: I want to know a little bit about it because I mean it's such a different world now. It's funny that's just 20 years ago and, you know, I'm old enough that I have a very clear memory of it. But I think for a lot of younger listeners Millennials and Gen Z, they'd be like, what? How is that even a thing?

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Mike Evans: So you used to have a phone in your kitchen. And it was like one phone for the whole house. You did, it was one phone for a lot of people that didn't move around.

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Carey Nieuwhof: And cell phones were still a luxury. There were no iPhones. Like rich people had cell phones.

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Mike Evans: Yeah, I did not have a cell phone at this time. I had a Palm Treo which was like an iPad. This tiny iPad.

Carey Nieuwhof: Functionally useless. The palm pilots. I had a couple of them and they were basically glorified digital calendars that usually didn't work.

Mike Evans: Yeah. They had challenges. So the phone system, What it did was, somebody would call from one of these non-cell phones, not smartphones. It's not digital. It just goes over an analog circuit. And that goes into this big exchange. And then I set up a VOIP server, a Voice Over Internet server, that would take those calls, turn them into digital, and then it would actually call the normal telephone system out. It would convert back into that. But I had a record of the call and the record of the call is what I needed to be able to track the number of orders for that restaurant.

Carey Nieuwhof: Because one of your challenges, if I remember right, was that people were saying, how do I know if this works?

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Mike Evans: That's right.

Carey Nieuwhof: It's kind of like, how do you know that people actually came because of the billboard versus your GrubHub idea? Okay, so this gave you trackability.

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Mike Evans: It did, and the best thing that had been around prior to that was coupons, how many coupons are you getting that had a particular code on them, or something. People still do this. I mean when you go to a URL from on a billboard, it tracks to that specific billboard so the marketers can see how effective their spend is.

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Carey Nieuwhof: Okay, so you did that and it grew to, did I hear you say 100 million dollars, using this VoIP system?

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Mike Evans: Yeah. Actually. It grew to a billion dollars in revenue. But at the time when it was only a hundred million dollars, the phone system was not great, restaurants didn't like it. We were starting to get flak from US. Senators about it, like, people didn't like it. The press didn't like it. Nobody likes the phone system.

Carey Nieuwhof: What were they complaining about?

Mike Evans: Whether or not the actual orders we were sending were truly orders. And this, by the way, was a whole example, I learned something about press, because the actual thing that was happening was, let's say we got a hundred phone calls, we could figure out that, okay, 73 of those were calls and probably, what we would do is we'd say, okay, we'll only charge for 63 instead of the 73, knowing that some of them are probably going to be not correct. And so we'd always be really conservative in the number of calls we said. But the Press picked up on the idea that every once in a while, one call we get through that people got charged for even though we were actually undercharging. That's what the press sort of latched onto.

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There's subtlety in that argument. Even just saying what I just said wouldn't have made it on CNN. It's way too long of an explanation. That we're actually undercharging because we're really conservative in our estimates. And so, that was like, the company needed to kill the phone system, but revenue is addictive. It's hard to get rid of it. And so this thing that was like the unlock early in the business became this anchor later in the business. And so there was a bunch of things like that. There were some things that weren't even beneficial. They were simply dead ends. They were simply bad ideas. Skip-the-line take-out ordering was terrible. GrubHub is a delivery company. Takeout orders were never a large part of the revenue or orders of the business. So all the software development that went into that was a dead end.

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Carey Nieuwhof: So you experimented with getting people to take out so you can just show up, and of course, you know, a lot of menus, that's what we do. We live in the middle of nowhere, just order your take out, come pick it up, but for you guys that didn't pan out.

Mike Evans: That was never going to be the business, but we tried it.

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But here's the thing, startups, and this is probably true with any business that's innovating, not just startups. It's experimental by nature. If you never fail, if you

never hit a dead end, then you're not innovating. You have to try things that you're not sure are going to work, but then you kind of have a gut feel that probably will work. And you're wrong sometimes. And so, the dead ends are not, I don't look at them as failures or things that I wish you could go back and try again, or do differently, because the path from point A to point B for an innovative product is never straight. It's a, it's a drunken stumble.

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And so you have to be willing to fail, and you have to be willing to abandon the failures, as well, when you realize that they're not working.

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Carey Nieuwhof: Wow. So you had a lot of success with this VoIP system, this phone call system. What was the breakthrough that eventually got you too what GrubHub became?

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Mike Evans: So that was online ordering. So we had this VoIP system which, I tell you, it seemed like a good idea at the time. It helped in the moment, and what ended up happening is, I went into a restaurant, BB's Bagels, and the story is in the book, and I saw that they had a fax machine. And he said he didn't want to answer the phone because he didn't want to staff the phones. They take too long to register the orders. And it makes sense if you're making \$15 on an order and it costs you \$15 an hour to \$12 dollars an hour, at the time, to pay somebody. It's actually hard to just make a profit on the person answering the phone, let alone making and delivering the food.

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So I was like, can I just send the order over a fax? This is what I was thinking. I could just hire somebody in the Philippines or Costa Rica or something, to listen to the order and then type it in, and then I was like, wait a minute. Why can't I just let the customer type in the order? Why not just make online ordering? It took, and I had already been doing this whole thing where I was digitizing the menus. I had been typing in the menu so that I could get Google and MSN and Yahoo to send traffic to my website. So I was already sort of publishing them in digital format. So the actual creation of online ordering, it took like a few hours. The technical step from Part A to Point B was so small. And because I was already charging the restaurants on a per-order basis for the phone system, I didn't even ask.

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I literally just started sending orders to the fax machines, and I was like, I'm just gonna turn it on and we'll see what happens. And everybody was like, oh these are great, this is way better than the phone, like nobody cancelled. Nobody had a problem with it.

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Carey Nieuwhof: So, just their faxes. And again, 20 years ago, their faxes started blowing up.

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Mike Evans: I think that the majority of orders probably still go over the fax machine or probably like 30 to 40%.

Carey Nieuwhof: Seriously in 2023, it's still faxes?

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Mike Evans: Restaurants still have fax machines and tablets still go down. So, I don't know, I haven't been at the company for a number of years, but the time I left in 2014, it was well over 50% of the orders were still going by fax not via tablets.

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Carey Nieuwhof: Crazy. Okay, so that was the breakthrough idea.

Mike Evans: It wasn't an idea. An idea makes it sound like a flash of inspiration, a thunderbolt from on high came, and suddenly, I didn't have the idea and then the next day, I had the idea and I was working. What actually was occurring, and this is an important distinction, because what I'm about to say, people can copy. The first, you can't just copy, I had a great idea, right? That doesn't help. What worked was, we were listening to customers trying to create something valuable for them, and making changes, and being willing to fail, and being willing to scrap the things that didn't work. And every day I was trying things, and so this was just 147th thing that I tried. And then when it worked, it was obvious in retrospect. And it looks like a bolt of inspiration, but actually, it was the inevitable result of a process of innovation.

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And it's an important distinction because you can create a process of innovation. You can't copy inspiration. That's just magic. That's just Harry Potter waving a wand that you can't copy. But you can copy the concepts of innovation.

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Carey Nieuwhof: And I think what's so interesting is you were pioneering in the sense that there was no Uber Eats at the time. There were none of the other services that everybody just takes for granted now. You're basically blazing a trail in this area.

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Mike Evans: Yeah. Domino's had started online ordering about two years, I think, before GrubHub did. I think in 2000, and there was a company that supplied that called Quick Order that was doing their own online ordering. And over the course of between 2002-2006, about 150 companies popped up that were doing online ordering.

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We largely beat out that first wave of competition. The next wave was really well-funded competitors, like Groupon and LivingSocial, they both started online ordering. Pea Pod, which had been doing grocery delivery was interested, like there was a bunch of other parties that tried. Micros and Aloha, which are the Point of Sale systems, they started doing online ordering. So there was a bunch of competition in sort of the second wave, and then the third wave was the very well-funded public competitors, which is who Uber Eats and DoorDash. And so, we always had competition, but we were ahead. We weren't first. This is a weird distinction. I call it first best

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Yahoo was before Google, but Google was better, and so, Google wasn't first, but they were the first best solution. It would be hard to be Google now.

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You couldn't just be the best anymore, right? So you have to be early, but you also have to be better in terms of competitive differentiators, and so, I had a head start simply by virtue of the fact that, as a software developer, I was able to code up a certain number of pieces of software that just didn't exist in the world. So if I were to start GrubHub now I'd use a company called Twilio for the VoIP integration, and I would use Google Maps to figure out how to turn addresses into latitudes and

longitudes, and I would use Amazon Web Services instead of buying a server from Micro Center and putting in my apartment with a Comcast internet, which is what I did when I started.

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So all of those manual things that were hard, were a head start.

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They did give me an eighteen-month jump on a lot of the competition. But, that distinction went away very quickly. And it became about being the best provider of product to the customer very quickly. Not just being first.

Carey Nieuwhof: I was gonna ask you about that, and I think you partially answered it already. But what would you say in that sort of wave one and wave two of online ordering innovation, what gave you the market dominance that you had? Why did you beat out all the other smaller fish so to speak?

Mike Evans: So the first wave, we had a couple of competitive differentiators. Our system worked, which is no small thing. In the early days, there were a lot of low-quality solutions, right? So it sounds like table stakes. But at the time it was a competitive differentiator. Our orders went through, the fax machines worked, we confirmed them correctly, consumers liked the experience, and the website was fast.

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It just worked. So that was actually enough early on to beat out the sort of first wave of competition. The second wave of competition was a combination of two things. The first thing was, we cheated, in terms of getting traffic to the website by collecting all of the menus for the cities we were in and publishing them online, which brought a lot of traffic to the website even before we signed restaurants up for online ordering. And the second piece was, we bet the entire company on customer service. So, I think it's 17% of all delivery orders have a problem with them. So, it's a massive failure rate. You get a Thai iced tea, instead of Thai iced coffee. There's a small fries instead of a large fries. The food doesn't show up, it's late.

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Carey Nieuwhof: You ordered it dairy-free. It came with dairy.

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Mike Evans: Yes. It's a very error-prone process.

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So we committed almost all the company's available resources to not just answering the phone when something went wrong and making the problem better, but eliminating the problems. So, sending orders to restaurants that had lower error rates, and finding out ways to share best practices with restaurants. We really worked at the root of the issues. Instead of just accepting that it was a bad order, a bad process, we made the process better.

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Carey Nieuwhof: So rather than just saying, hey, here's your money back and a coupon for next time you actually got to the root. What was the restaurant, that's a lot of work. It's harder than a refund. Did you get pushback from restaurant tours on how to lower the error rate, or were they happy to see you and happy to take advice?

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Mike Evans: So, we learned this from a restaurant. This story is in the book, where I go on a restaurant tour with David Morton from Pompeii, a restaurant in Chicago.

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He talked to us about this idea of like, apologize, give the money back. Yes. That's step one. Step two is the promise. Whatever happened to you isn't gonna happen again. So, at the time, we were starting to get pretty big. We had probably 10,000 restaurants on the platform. The easier thing to do than fix problems at restaurants that don't necessarily want to talk to you is just to send the orders to the restaurants that are doing well. And so we started with that. And then that created motivation. For some of these restaurants, we were sending 50, 60, 70 percent of their business. And when you start pulling orders away because they're messing up too much, it creates motivation to do better very quickly.

Carey Nieuwhof: Okay. So it wasn't like you were showing up and giving them a management class. It was just like, hey, we're not going to be able to support you.

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Mike Evans: For the restaurants that wanted to engage, that wanted to get better, that wanted to get more orders, we shared best practices and we'd say things like, print out the order and staple it to the bag and have the driver check it before you go

out. Whatever the best practice is. That alone might cut down the error rate by 50%, right? So we would share some of those best practices. So what we were really doing is we were making delivery better. So if you order from LivingSocial, where online ordering is one of eight things that they do, or you order from GrubHub where the entire mentality is focused around making the actual experience better. The experience will be better. So that was what we committed to, and it worked. It worked beautifully. We beat all of the competition. We had a massive amount of the market share when we went public. It was really fun. It's really fun to be the best, you know? It's hard. It was hard work, as you mentioned, but it was also very rewarding.

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Carey Nieuwhof: What year was your IPO?

Mike Evans: 2014.

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Carey Nieuwhof: 2014. Yeah and that's when you exited the company which we'll get to I want to go back because one of the things I thought was really awesome, you hinted at it. You said you weren't good at selling. Couldn't figure that out. You could code, and then you literally went into a Borders, I think, and bought *Selling for Dummies*, those yellow and black books. I'd love to know what did you learn from *Selling for Dummies*?

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Mike Evans: There was a lot in there, but the core message for sales was this. Step One is listen to your customer. Step two is share your solution. Step three is ask for money. And it sounds simple, but I have an example of an investment bank skipping step one and not listening to the customer first, and they lost a multi-million dollar deal with us in the IPO.

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You just have to listen to the customer. And this isn't like one of those things where you let them talk waiting for them to stop so you can sell to them. That's not listening. That's something else. You literally just have to listen to your customers. Listen to what their problems are listen to what their challenges are. Create a personal connection. And the reason that is so helpful is because if you do that enough times, you start hearing patterns, and then your solution starts to match, very quickly, the problems, in our case, the problems that restaurants were having.

And you know, I've had a thousand entrepreneurs talk to me about different technology for restaurants, and like 900 of them are real dated to making restaurant owner's lives easier. If you talk to restaurant owners, they don't care about that. They don't care about the fact that their lives are hard. They care about getting more customers. They're like, if you send me too many customers, I'll build out a bigger kitchen. I know how to do that all day long. I can hire more cooks. But getting more customers is hard for me. And so that was the thing over and over again. The only thing the restaurants cared about was, "send me more customers," that's it. I don't care about your tablet. I don't care about whether it's fax or tablet. I don't care. I'll take faxes as long as it's new customers. So we start with that. Listening to customers.

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Then if you have a solution that is actually helpful, then offer, if not like say goodbye. There's no point in telling somebody something they don't need. I have some restaurants tell me, "I've got all the business I need. I don't need anymore," and I'd be like "Well, thanks for your time. Here if you change your mind. I'll be here." And they're not used to that from a salesperson, right? They're not used to this idea of, I'm not just going to sell to you no matter what. And by the way, some of those people would call you back later because I was being honest, right? I was being genuine. And then the third piece is asking for money, and a lot of sales books focus on this. It's just a friendly chat unless you ask for the money. So, yeah, that's what I learned from *Selling for Dummies*. There's other stuff in there about prospecting, and the difference between canvassing and calling. A bunch of details, but really the core of it was those three concepts.

[00:34:58.600]

Carey Nieuwhof: You tell a really interesting story. I think you call it the best pizzeria in America. It's a block or two from your house in Chicago, tell the story. I don't want to ruin it. So tell the story about this guy and set the scene in the restaurant, because it was really interesting.

[00:35:16.100]

Mike Evans: So JB Alberto's is the best pizza restaurant in the nation. And it's run by a guy named Tony. And literally, I could walk to it from my house. I didn't have to make grow hub. I could have just started ordering. I just found this first place because skipped the entire make-a-billion-dollar-company and just had great pizza. I was trying to sign him up. This was early on, that was one of the restaurants I went to pretty early.

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From where my house was, I was just walking to all the close restaurants to sign them up, and they just weren't interested. They had salespeople come in all the time. You know, they'd sit me down with, so it's the guy who owned the restaurant and a bunch of, I think it was their uncles, they may not have actually been related, it was a bunch of old dudes who sat in there and grilled the salespeople.

[00:36:12.800]

It was like a sport for them. They enjoyed grilling the young salespeople. Like what else was I going to do on a Monday while waiting for the business to start?

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So it was like duck hunting or something. I was just a target but they listened.

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And they also told me what their challenges are and they appreciated that I was listening to them. And so in the book it's like I can condense it into 3 visits, but it probably was actually like 7 or 8 in reality.

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I just kept going back and saying, okay, will this work? Will this work? And to the point where I stopped actually trying to sell them and was just trying to get advice. And in the end, the advice I got from them, they didn't sign up for years and years and years and ultimately they did.

[00:37:05.400]

But I got tons of tons of advice, especially around this idea of, repeat customers are what really makes a business, not new customers.

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There's sort of an anecdote that happened after the end of the book that happened like about a year ago, is that Tony called me up and he was like, "Hey, will you talk to my son about how to run a business?" And I was like, "I learned it from you!" He's like, "Yeah, I know. My kid doesn't listen to me but he'll listen to you." And so I ended up having a conversation with Tony's son while he was in college about entrepreneurship, and literally just parroting back the things that Tony had said to me. But it was a lesson in that sons can't really learn from their fathers in some

ways. They just need another person to say the same things. But it's kind of fun that's gone full circle. And I'm still in touch with Tony, and he's a great guy.

Carey Nieuwhof: Did he eventually sign up for GrubHub?

Mike Evans: He did. He signed up and canceled a few times. He's been on and off the platform a few times. And whenever he's on the platform, I order pizza. And still to this day. I only order on GrubHub, even though I don't own any of the company anymore. I'm not involved with them. I still have loyalty to the brand.

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Carey Nieuwhof: That's fantastic.

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Any other early struggles you think would be helpful for entrepreneurs to hear or other early breakthroughs?

[00:38:26.700]

Mike Evans: Yeah, I think I think hiring, it was challenging for me, because I had never managed anyone. I got no lessons in managing. I happened to have a great manager at the one job I had between college and GrubHub and I learned a lot from him, his name is Kevin, and I think everything from like, when do you hire, who do hire, you know, I learned pretty early on to hire people for jobs that I didn't want to do. So I recognized the things I didn't want to do that I also didn't do a good job at.

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So, really the metric is, am I good at this? Or is somebody going to be better at this than me? And a good place to look is the things that you hate doing and hire somebody to do those. Because they'll do them well. And then the next step was, the things that I actually came to enjoy. I actually came to enjoy sales. It turned out I still shouldn't do it because it turns out that other people who are professional and who spent their entire lives at it were better at it than me. And so hiring professional salespeople was important. So the who and when was hard, you know, I messed up. So, I've started a second business Fixer, which is a handyperson membership, and I messed up something in the early days of GrubHub that I've gotten right this time.

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I relied a lot on people I knew on my network to hire early at GrubHub. And I now think of that as a mistake, not because it was successful. But because the success for

the people I hired lined up with the biases that were just intrinsic to my personal network. So I'm a white dude. So most of my friends are white dudes. That's the way life typically goes. And so what ended up happening is by hiring people I knew, I ended up hiring with a bias toward that demographic. And arguably, not arguably, that was very unfair in terms of the opportunity that was available within the startup world, especially for the startup that turned out to be so successful. So now, fast forward 15 years. Now when I do the hiring, I always post the jobs on Indeed. I always go outside of my network.

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I make sure that there's representation in the places I advertise. So, in the construction business, I don't just advertise on construction platforms because they're 98% male and we're trying to create a gender-inclusive way into the trades. And so we advertise on Facebook and we advertise, we try and hire people who were working at Target or Whole Foods and give them a path into the trades where we can train them. And so, that was a mistake I made early on, was relying too heavily on my own personal network, and instead, it just embedded demographic biases that I regret, looking back.

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Carey Nieuwhof: Hmm. Yeah and Fixer, just so people know it's an app, I guess, I'm in Toronto, that where if you need a plumber, you find a plumber there. If you need an electrician, you find electrician...

Mike Evans: Not quite. So, it's handy people only. We do handy personal work in the home, and all of the people do the work are employees W-2 employees, who we vet, full-time employees with benefits. They're not contractors. And we train them from scratch. We hire people who aren't in the trades, we train them how to be handy people, over the course of years, sometimes. And then we do handy people jobs in people's homes, but it's a membership service, primarily. And so we show up every month, so you find us, we usually fix the toilet, and then most customers sign us up to come back every month and deal with all the stuff that breaks in a home so that they don't have to deal with it.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's pretty cool. What are some of the examples of things you would fix? Because there is something always breaking in a home.

Mike Evans: So usually in the first three months, we fix whatever's on your mind. So homeowners have a list of things that they haven't gotten to. Installing the fan that

that in the room that should have had a fan that has a light, putting a dimmer switch in, fixing the weather stripping at the bottom of the door, an exterior door.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah. Those little things you're supposed to do on a Saturday and you never do.

Mike Evans: Right, and then after the first few months, it transitions to, we come with the ideas. And so, everything from, so this month we checked all of the fire alarms, checked the fire extinguishers, and made sure that each house we were in had a fire blanket. So today was the fire safety month, and next month we might go through and every month we change all the light bulbs. And all of the things you just don't want to deal with in a home, we just do it. It's just a membership service that does that.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, that's pretty cool. Okay.

Mike Evans: I don't change lightbulbs in my own house anymore, it's great.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's fantastic. So let's talk about team leadership. You have a co-founder in Matt Maloney. You've taken on Venture Capital, several rounds, which you write about in the book, and you've grown a huge staff. What have you learned about making partnerships and teams work? Like many leaders, you've got a lot of strong opinions, too.

Mike Evans: Yeah, I think having a mission statement and values that are real, that people use, are really important.

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So that starts with not creating them by fiat. So you don't just say, "this is our mission and values." You bring a group together and you have tough conversations about what are values and what aren't, and what's really important to you as a company. And so, for instance, at Fixer, one of our core values is respect because we're trying to create a gender-inclusive employment place in the trades, which is hard to do. They're historically very male-dominated. We realized respect was the most important value. If people respect each other, it works. If they don't, it doesn't work. But I didn't just say that. We came together as a team and we did it. And then, I'll use Fixer as an example, and this it was similar to what we did at GrubHub. But then we use that for hiring. We make sure the candidates are respectful to all of the people interviewing them. By the way, some of which are men, and some are women. And so, we're finding out if they can be respectful, regardless of a person's gender. And so, we hire them based on that, we have all of our discipline conversations based on our core values. We give bonuses based on the core values.

So, if customers mention that a Fixer is respectful in a review. They get a bonus for every time there's a mention in customer reviews. And then the person with the most gets a big bonus after January. The mission is the thing that doesn't change. It's usually the same for ten years at a time. The values don't change a lot. And then the goals would change every year. Making sure that everyone knows what they are, and you're constantly reiterating them and making sure that people understand how their daily work ladders up to the annual goal. That in total is what allowed us to be comfortable with people making their own decisions, having the empowerment and the independence to make their own decisions about how to work with restaurants, and as long as they're doing within our mission and values, we trust that they're making the right decisions. And so, we set big picture concepts, we set mission, we set values, and we set goals, and then we say "Go!" and this is key, and then we got out of their way. I don't understand people who micromanage. It's a lot of dang work. And people don't like being micromanaged. I don't understand why people like to micromanage. You need to hire people and then trust them.

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And then let them run, let them sprint, let them stub their toes and make changes, and then also let them come up with great ideas you would've never come up with. And, that mentality, Matt and I were aligned in that, and it works great. I mean, we had the graphic designer, the first employee I hired, who originally was doing stuff with paper menus, he ultimately designed a Super Bowl ad, right? You don't get that opportunity when you're 22, over the course of this first seven years of your career, to get to that level. Unless you work at a company that's growing real fast where people just let you not, just make mistakes, but make amazing innovations. And so that was the mindset at GrubHub. People were empowered.

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Carey Nieuwhof: Well one of the things, it's a pretty honest book. It's called Hungry, by the way, a startup journey, and I don't know that I have read a biographical account that is that honest about the frustrations with business. And we've talked about the success of GrubHub. But you also said, and I think these are your words, that you kind of created a Frankenstein. A company that, as much as you loved it, you were anxious to get out of and very frustrated at times. It kind of grew up and the monster started to attack you. How did GrubHub or why did GrubHub become a Frankenstein to you?

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Mike Evans: So this is related to the mission and the goals of the company. And my mission and goals. And, when I started, the two things were the same. It was just me running the company, right? And so I wanted to pay off my student loans.

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I overshot that by quite a bit, right?

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah. What was the IPO?

Mike Evans: The IPO was \$2.6 billion.

Carey Nieuwhof: \$2.6 billion. I think your loans are covered.

Mike Evans: Yeah, I mean my loans were \$260,000, so that's a million times as large. A hundred thousand times. So, my goal morphed. It became, I wanted to help independent restaurants succeed, and I would say the main theme of the book is that you have to define success for yourself. Everyone will define success for you, friends, family, your church, your government, whatever. Everybody will define success for you, but if you define it for yourself, you're much more likely to hit it. And that intentionality makes for a very fulfilling life. And so, my goal became to help independent restaurants succeed.

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And that worked really well when we had 20,000 restaurants, when we were competing against Groupon LivingSocial, it worked really well when we had 70,000 restaurants, when we were competing against Uber Eats. My goal of helping independent restaurants did not ultimately jive with the public company's goal of maximizing shareholder return. Those are two different things that I could not reconcile. And as the company got bigger and I owned a smaller and smaller percentage of it, my ability to shift the company's goal became less. And so, ultimately, I decided this is not a goal I want to be on board with. I still like the company, it still does help independent restaurants, but it does it as a means to an end, it does it as an ancillary thing, and it's not the main drive of the company.

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And so ultimately, I decided I can't reconcile my mission and the company's mission. That it's time for me to leave and go start another company. Well, at the time I didn't know I was gonna start another company. It was time for me to leave. Ultimately I decided to start another company where we wrote the mission into the bones of the company and it's really intrinsic to the business model. We train people from

scratch at Fixer, because there aren't enough tradespeople in the communities we serve.

Carey Nieuwhof: There's not enough tradespeople, period.

Mike Evans: Because most of the trade schools have closed. And so we said, well, if we train people from scratch, we're creating community benefit at the same time that we're creating profit. And so, I built a business where my mission and my values are much more in the DNA of the company and can't be changed, by making a business model.

Carey Nieuwhof: So I'd love to know, because when you mentioned you built a Frankenstein, I've talked to a lot of pastors who kind of feel that way. Not that they think their churches are fake or wrong.

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And I've talked to a lot of business leaders, like, the thing I loved about it, you kind of hinted out of the beginning, although, this is not where you went. Like, you loved coding but then, eventually, you realized, oh I can't code anymore. Not if this going to be successful. Or now, all of a sudden I'm managing, you know, 17 locations, or five locations or, I've got 50 staff, not five staff and I loved it when we could all sit in the same booth at lunch together.

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Now, I got to rent out a whole restaurant to have a staff gathering. And they kind of feel like they built a Frankenstein, or they've ended up leading a Frankenstein.

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So, I take it Fixer has scaled to some degree in the last six years, right? Since you founded it. Do you find with the integration of values it feels less like a Frankenstein? Or how are you processing that?

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Mike Evans: Yeah, I think I would separate out feeling like the nature of the work changed, and the mission changed. Those are two different things.

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I went from being an individual contributor, I guess the parallel is pastoral care and individual conversations with parishioners, that doesn't scale to seven locations, seven campuses.

Carey Nieuwhof: Nope. It doesn't scale to one big location.

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Mike Evans: Me being good at writing software is not relevant when you have 100 software developers. It's a little bit relevant, because I can at least speak the language.

Carey Nieuwhof: You can say, hey guys, here's the problem with the code.

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Mike Evans: But the most concrete example in my life is that I went from, a meeting with a co-worker represented an interruption of work, when I started the business, by the end of the business, a meeting was my work. I couldn't do any work outside of meetings. That was the only thing I could do was influence other human beings by talking to them.

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The nature of the work changed and I was fine with it. I didn't mind the nature of the work changing. And so that's one thing. I liked coding. I also liked being in meetings and managing people. Like, I found them challenging. I learned, and I liked certain aspects of all those things. It was really the departure from mission. And so, I think in a church situation, if it went from, we grew because we were really great at serving people to, now we have to keep our numbers up to pay for the mortgage for our seven campuses. That's a that's a departure from mission. Not a change in the nature of the work. And you should be upset about it. You should be depressed about it. You'd be mad as heck about it, and do something to change it.

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Carey Nieuwhof: No, that's a really good point, and I think the machine ends up running them. Were you burnt out by the time of the IPO at GrubHub? How would you describe your emotional condition?

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Mike Evans: I wasn't. I was ready to work some more. But it looks like burnout because working towards a vision you aren't compelled to be a part of looks a heck of a lot like, "I just am tired." And so I don't think I was burnt out. I think I just disagreed with what my effort could bring about at the company. I didn't want that to be my effort. I didn't want it to be where I was putting my energy.

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And so it looked like burnout because I didn't want to put my energy towards it, but it wasn't because I didn't have energy. I then went and rode a bicycle across the United States. I still had plenty of energy.

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Carey Nieuwhof: We're gonna get there. What impact did a start-up have on your marriage? Because you've got some sections in the book about marriage, you've got a chapter on your marriage. What impact did that have on you and your wife?

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Mike Evans: Disastrous. I mean we came close to divorce, and it was really challenging. So my wife is also a recovered attorney, much like yourself, and so she got a fellowship with International Justice Mission, which is an organization that sends attorneys internationally and she went to go train attorneys, first in Zambia and then in Chennai, India with that organization as a Fellow.

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At the time we were like, great. I can work on GrubHub and you can go do this and we'll come back together at the end of it. We had been married six years by the time that happened. And, in retrospect, boy, it would've been great to experience that with her, like to grow in that place where I was there with her. And there were so many times where my career took priority over her career. And it wasn't fair. And so she reacted with resentment out of that unfairness, which is the appropriate emotion. I think I caused some real challenges there.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah. And what was that? There were a lot of hours, I think at one point you said, when you were working 80 hours a week. That kind of thing, what were some of the factors? And how has that changed since you launched Fixer or walked away from GrubHub, nine years ago?

Mike Evans: At the time, we didn't have kids, and the typical work week was 60 hours, it didn't very often get to 80. It would have been fine. I don't think that's the thing that really caused the challenge. We still could find time to spend time together. That would not work now that I have a kid, there's no way I could find time for family and work 60 hours a week with the kid, but we would have been fine I think. It was really that the choices I made, which really anchored us in Chicago kept her from being able to work in D.C. for IJM, for example, or in Geneva or somewhere where her work in international human rights would have been. It's just

hard to get an international human rights job as a lawyer in Chicago. There's like exactly zero jobs for that.

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And so it was more the choice of putting my work before her work, is what really caused the friction. Again, it was really more about mission alignment than it was about the day-to-day.

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Carey Nieuwhof: Being married to an attorney, I can tell you that is a challenge we had to make those decisions. We met in law school. It's like who's going to have the dominant career, and by mutual agreement, we agreed it would be mine, that I would work at the church and we never knew we'd end up doing this. And now it's a much more equal split that the kids are older and gone, but yeah, that's a real challenge. It can be.

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Mike Evans: It's different now, at Fixer I had the luxury of being able to hire a team from day one, instead of doing it myself, and I architected my week around the idea that I have extra time.

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But I'd be lying if I said, you know, my daughter was home sick yesterday with an ear infection and it was like a bowling ball just crashed into all of our plans and schedules. And you still have to make the choice. Which one of the two of us is going to sacrifice our workday to watch the kid? And more and more, that's me as opposed to her, because that's the stage of life we're in. But I've also set up the company so that I don't need to be there every day. I don't micromanage. That's very intentional. I've been thoughtful and upfront about my time commitments at work.

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Carey Nieuwhof: One of the other value challenges you had, you had very strong thoughts around the gig economy, contract workers. You mentioned that Fixer, everybody is a W-2 employee. And I think you advocated at one point when you were at GrubHub.

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Like, hey what's going on with this gig economy that we're kind of building into? Because again, that wasn't even a term that I don't think was around in 2002; gig economy.

Mike Evans: It was not. And GrubHub was one of the pioneers. And so, I have two major issues with the gig economy as it currently exists. The first one is that our society, there's an expectation among all workers in our society that we have economic mobility, and our earning power increases from our 20s up through at least, our 40s or 50s, and because of that, we go from being in debt to not being in debt, to being able to save for the future.

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Carey Nieuwhof: Yep.

Mike Evans: If you worked five years as an Uber driver, you have no more marketable skills, and you are no more economically viable. Like you have no more earning potential than when you started. There's no as a full-time, 40-hour-a-week role, It doesn't fulfill the social contract that we expect so that people will be able to live their lives through to retirement. And I think that that's really challenging. Now is that the company's problem to solve? I don't know, maybe, maybe not, but there's something wrong about just saying it's not our problem and this 40-hour a week job and there's no advancement. That's one thing that really bothers me about the 40-hour a week version. Now, the 10-hour a week side-hustle with lots of flexibility, for the person who has a lot of commitments. That's actually a really good thing for our society. That's sort of my first issue with the economy. The second issue of the economy is that fir good or for ill, in the United States, we expect employers to pay for health insurance. And our entire healthcare system is built around that premise. There is no public option. And so by sidestepping that responsibility using gig economy workers, what the companies that use them are really doing is they're taking that burden and they're putting it on the community, the local communities. So the hospital that has to offer services, regardless of income level. or massive amounts of debt for individuals, or whatever the case is. And so, either we need to say that companies are not responsible for health care or all companies must be responsible for health care. But letting some just skip out on their responsibility, it's actually the opposite of a good free market because you've created protections for a class of companies that shouldn't have it.

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And so that's my other issue, is the gig economy doesn't mean it doesn't actually cover the real costs of doing business in the community.

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Carey Nieuwhof: So you went from running a company that was really the gig economy. You probably had some brass at the top of GrubHub, but a lot of it was gig-based to a company that is not gig-based. What do you see in the difference with your teams?

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Mike Evans: Yeah, so that's my current company is all employees. There's a training element so that the people who enter and have no trade skills, we train them, and then they continue to acquire skills over time, and then eventually they leave to go become electricians or plumbers where they can make more money, right? And so they're with us for a time.

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There are things that are harder about it, right?

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We have to work through issues when somebody has scheduling issues related to a family situation, or they get sick with covid, or whatever.

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When something happens, we have to be committed to helping them through that. Seeing them through that to the degree that we can. And it's really easy to just wash your hands of it if it's a gig economy situation, and so that's harder. So that's just the harder part. The flip side of that is our workers are incredibly highly skilled, and they care about the work that they do in customers' homes.

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And so the product that we deliver to customers is much higher than we could ever possibly do with gig economy work.

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And so ultimately, since businesses exist to create value for customers, it's the way to go. So it's a mixed bag, right? It's way better for customers but it is a little bit harder to run the company, because it's harder because you have to care about the people you work with, which, by the way, is probably a good thing, right? So, it's been more challenging for sure. But it's also been a lot more fulfilling and rewarding.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well and you can standardize things too. I got into an Uber recently, I was in Tennessee. and I don't know whether their standards have dropped or whether I just got the wrong driver. But I'm like, is this car even roadworthy? Like it was bad. Like really bad. And I don't know, man, it's a really interesting moment in history. Mike, you also said, entrepreneurs have to be great at quitting things. So what are some things you've quit that you're grateful for? And is there anything that you've quit that you're like, that was too soon?

[01:03:38.800]

Mike Evans: Yeah well, I say that entrepreneurs should be good at quitting things is because the nature of what they're doing is innovation. If you're truly innovating, you can't know that every single thing you're going to try will actually work out. I mean, the thing I'm most happy I quit was GrubHub, there was a misalignment between my goals and my values, and where the company was headed, and I don't think they're an evil company. I don't think that they're bad company. I just think I wanted something different from what the stakeholders and shareholders of the company wanted. And so leaving was the right thing to do. You can either change the thing you're working on, like I could have made GrubHub come back into alignment with my goals, or I could leave and go do something else. And so rather than get hung up on the fact that I'd been there since I started it, it was my baby. I had all of this.

[01:04:33.800]

There's a lot of vanity reasons to stay, right, like I can kind of sit back and just take the accolades and go to conferences and it would have been great, you know? Hangry, the book I wrote it would have been a very different book, and probably would have sold better if I could've used GrubHub's email list to sell it. Since I'm not super complimentary about the company in the book, they, as you might imagine, did not decide to send an email. and

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, they probably weren't going to email this book out.

Mike Evans: They didn't. So I think that that was a good decision for me. Ultimately, it led to my cross-country bike trip. I was able to spend the first two years at home with my daughter, and I was able to start another company, and I couldn't have done any of those things if I didn't have some cost thinking, I didn't say I put that money and that effort and that energy and that youth, and all of that into that company, but starting today, that's not the right decision. And I'm not going to let my past decisions govern what's good for me today and in the future. And so that was a great one. I think quitting software development at the time I was in GrubHub

was a really good idea. Moving towards really putting my energy towards leading a company instead of writing software. That was good. I think the second part of your question is, have I quit anything that I regret quitting? I've tried to learn Spanish like five times. I just can't. I have not... I have not figured out how to speak, and every time I put my effort, I ended up just watching TV or something.

[01:06:04.400]

Carey Nieuwhof: Fair enough. Oh, that's great. Okay, we haven't talked about your bike trip. I'm also a cyclist. But you exit GrubHub. You don't have any more financial worries. Your student debt is paid. You've got significant amounts of money in the bank and investments. You decide to go on a cross-country bike trip on a recumbent bike. So I'm a cyclist, before you reveal that I'm like, oh yeah, I can't imagine what that looks like. Then all of a sudden. Okay, I think 99% of people don't even know what a recumbent bike is. Can you explain it? I do and I'm like, holy cow good for you.

[01:06:42.100]

Mike Evans: Yeah. A recumbent bike is, instead of sitting on a saddle, you sit in a lawn chair, and you still have a wheel in front of you in a wheel back of you. But you can be angled a bunch of different directions because there's a bunch of different types of recumbent bikes, but I was angled just a little bit back, and the whole reason I did it, they're not actually much harder to ride. They take less effort because you have a windshield.

[01:07:05.600]

Carey Nieuwhof: It's almost like a bike trailer, if you could imagine it. If you've ever seen, you know, parents pulling their kids in a bike trailer. It's almost a little bit like that. It's triangular and you're sitting back pedaling like you would on a paddleboat, only, you're almost fully reclined.

[01:07:25.000]

Mike Evans: I was not almost fully reclined. I was back about 10 degrees so similar to like you sit in a driver's seat in your car.

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh, I didn't realize that. I haven't seen that model. Okay.

Mike Evans: I was not way back, I was just a little bit back. The whole reason I did it, and this might sound like a silly reason, was when you're on a road bike you're typically looking at the little white stripe on the road. Your head is angled down and

it hurts your neck to look up. For like six hours, if you tried to look at the horizon, your neck would be killing you.

[01:07:57.900]

I rode the recumbent bike so that my eyes were just on the horizon. I just wanted to look around. That was it. I wanted to see the country. That was the whole reason for the recumbent bike.

[01:08:06.500]

Carey Nieuwhof: So you couldn't have done that on a mountain bike, or on a hybrid bike, or on a city cruiser? I'm just curious but recumbent bike just fit the bill?

[01:08:16.500]

Mike Evans: It did. I mean, sitting there on a lawn chair, having my hands rested, it was great. It was way more comfortable. But I mean, I still had to turn that crank a million times to get across the country. So it still took a lot of effort.

[01:08:31.300]

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah. And did I read this right?

[01:08:33.400]

Did you train on a road bike to prepare for this? And then you end up in a recumbent? Not not the same thing.

[01:08:40.900]

Mike Evans: No. I ordered the recumbant like six months prior to the trip, and it showed up three days ahead of time. And actually, I took one practice ride before I left and I fell over on the thing and skinned my knee. I started the trip with a skinned knee. I wouldn't recommend that. I would recommend getting it a little earlier.

[01:08:59.500]

Carey Nieuwhof: Uh-huh. And what did you learn on that cross-country trek?

Mike Evans: One of the really significant moments for me.

[01:09:11.000]

Right before the IPO, we used an investment bank like everybody does for an IPO, and the investment bank ,you have to fly around all these different investors, and

they provided a private jet for us to fly around to all these different investors. And so the final trip trip from Chicago to New York to do the IPO. I mean the the meal that they served on the plane, it was like a celebration, right? It was like lobster, and steak, and shrimp, and all this amazing stuff, and it was magical, it was great. And there's an investment banker there. And he's very eager and really good at his job and I had a conversation with him on the plane. It was great.

[01:09:47.900]

Fast forward.

[01:09:49.000]

This is only a month later, 30 days later, maybe 40 days later, I'm setting up my tent in a city park in Kansas on my bike trip. And a kid comes up from a church and says, "Hey mister, I've got these peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Here you go, and would you like to come to our Bible study?"

[01:10:06.100]

Well first. Yes.

[01:10:07.400]

First thing is, "Do you know Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior?" And like I do, but I just want to eat my Mac and Cheese, leave me alone. It's like I'm sorry. I did not want to talk to him, but I was like on the outside I was like, hey, thanks for the sandwich, because I was trying to not be a total jerk. But I did end up having a conversation with this kid, he's probably 17 years old. He gave me a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. It tasted great. Which person do you want to talk to? Do you want to talk to the investment banker on the private jet? Do you want to talk to the kid who brought you a sandwich out of the goodness of his heart? You want to talk to the kid with a sandwich. And I mean, I think this was the thing, that I knew, that I relearned on the bike trip.

[01:10:47.700]

The relationships that I value with just the people that I come across in everyday life, I value those a lot more than the investment banking relationships, and the investor relationships in the startup world. That world's very skewed. And so, I just learned that lesson again and again and again on the trip. I would go into a town, and they'd say things like, "hey, this trip you're on, on a bike, is great. But I'd be careful. You know, two towns down, they're all crazy. And in the next town, they're okay. But be careful when you ride out of here." And you go to towns over and turns

out, and by the way, that person who said that was incredibly nice, they invite us in their home, that made me a homecooked meal. You know, they sent me on the way with cookies, like just incredibly gracious, and kind, of wonderful people.

[01:11:34.200]

I get two towns down and I meet the same, incredibly kind, and gracious, and wonderful people. And they are so nice to me, and they and they take care of me, and they give me a place to sleep, or I can sleep in a tent in their yard, or whatever, it just happens again and again. But the people in that town, they're like "watch out those people to towns down, they're crazy, watch out." And so what I learned was everyone in the country is amazingly gracious and kind and wonderful. And they all think that everybody else isn't. And they're all wrong, they're all wrong about the second part. And I just saw it again, and again, and again, that people were kind and gracious and loving and caring and welcoming. And yet they also carried this fear of others. And it was a weird thing to learn both those things at the same time.

[01:12:27.200]

Carey Nieuwhof: Talk about the physicality of riding across America. I mean, man, I empathized with your description of your hamstrings.

[01:12:38.500]

Mike Evans: So it was a 45-hundred-mile bike ride. But in some sense it wasn't. It was actually 90 50-mile bike rides, and the first ten of them were real hard, and the next 80 were actually pretty easy. So, it turns out that you really can't train for cycling eight hours a day, unless you cycle for eight hours a day. And so the first two weeks were always going to be very painful, and I think that was true for most of the other riders that were on the trail. And so it was really hard getting up the Blue Ridge Parkway in Kentucky. It was so painful and I was so tired.

[01:13:19.200]

But I then took some rest days. This great guy, Thomas, told me to take some days just totally resting. I recovered, my muscles healed, and then I got much stronger to the point where, when I went up the Rockies when I went up Hoosier Pass, it just wasn't that hard. I just, like, peddled to the top. And so I mean, there's something pretty magical about losing thirty pounds while eating 6,000 calories a day, I mean, I ate like a King. It was great. And I just got strong. My body just got really, really strong. You know what it reminded me of was when I was like fifteen, sixteen seventeen when I was first developing into a man, I just remember like, oh, I'm strong, like I never used to be strong, and now I'm strong, and it felt really good. I

remember sort of reading a book that talks about that and being like, oh, yeah, that's how I feel. And then it felt good to go through that like at 40. It felt really good to get strong again at that age. It was really satisfying.

[01:14:17.600]

I thought it was going to be this amazing spiritual journey. I thought I was going to get a chance to pray a lot. It turns out I was mostly just tired all the time and I didn't. I was just like, I'm pedaling, and now I'm eating, and I'm sleeping, and I'm pedaling. But then, by the time I got into the Rockies and was really getting much stronger, I wasn't as tired as much, and I got a chance to ponder, and to think and be introspective, and to pray. And so the second half, the trip became much more spiritual. Well, maybe the first half actually was very spiritual and I just wasn't as mindful of it, but the second half the trip, I had time to think about it more.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, any insights that stick with you?

Mike Evans: It's real hard to be present.

[01:15:00.900]

I got like, I don't know, 12 minutes over the course of 4,500 miles where I was just content, and in the moment, and not worried. And I think of those moments as very deeply spiritual. But they're very rare. Those moments of contentment and peace. They're incredibly rare, even when you have three months dedicated to it. So that was insightful. I had a few moments when I was riding, especially when I was riding solo through Kentucky and Tennessee, and Illinois a little bit, where I was by myself and I just all the time in the world. And so I'd be sitting at a gas station and I became this...it was weird. I was almost like a traveling Confessor.

[01:15:45.200]

People would just tell me about their lives, simply because I had time to listen. I just had time. I think you had a guest on who talked about his first book, it was about radically reducing hurry in your life?

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah. John Mark Comer.

Mike Evans: Yeah. I mean, that's what happened is I wasn't in a hurry, and people talked to me.

Carey Nieuwhof: If you're just sitting there eating a candy bar and sipping a Coke with all the time in the world.

Mike Evans: With a weird-looking bike.

Carey Nieuwhof: With a weird-looking bike. People come up and start talking to you. If you're not in a rush, right?

Mike Evans: They do. Some of those conversations were two hours long. And you know, I learned the importance of slowing down, and listening, and being open to people. I have since forgotten that. But this time I learned it.

[01:16:31.500]

Carey Nieuwhof: No, you know, it's interesting, almost a decade later, this is a recurring theme on the podcast, too. Because we talk to people who switch careers, or leave, or whatever, but we think back to the investment bankers, the GrubHub days, I mean, you were on the cover of magazines, all that stuff, being interviewed, how many of those relationships endure nine years later?

Mike Evans: Um, not zero, but like not three. You know,

Carey Nieuwhof: I know, I know. That's why I'm asking the question. Yeah.

Mike Evans: And those people that I connected with, I connected with for reasons other than the work. We just connected as people.

[01:17:14.500]

Carey Nieuwhof: Have you read strength to strength by Arthur Brooks?

[01:17:16.900]

Mike Evans: No, I haven't.

[01:17:18.100]

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh, fantastic book. And one of the insights, he talks about "real friends and deal friends." And I read that last year, can't get it out of my head, but yeah, a lot of people are great people, but they're "deal friends," they came with the deal. They were there because of GrubHub, they were there because of the IPO, they were there because of the growth, or whatever. And a decade later, what are you left with? Real friends. And as you say, yeah, it's probably one or two.

[01:17:42.900]

Mike Evans: All right, can I ask you a question?

Carey Nieuwhof: Totally! 100%.

Mike Evans: Turn this around a little bit? You make a lot of deal friends. You're talking to guests on podcasts. You have amazing conversations. But then they're over. Those relationships are over. That's gotta be hard.

[01:17:59.400]

Carey Nieuwhof: You know what it's it and it's not. It was very clarifying to read 560-70 episodes in, whatever we are. So I've had over 500 conversations with some amazing leaders, and without naming names, a lot of them, I could just email today or shoot a text to and, like John Mark Comer. We haven't hung out in person, but I could text him today, he'd get back to me and everything. And those are really wonderful people to know along the journey. But you know, I had Malcolm Gladwell on last summer. He'd probably take my call if I called him. But you know, there's that handful like, who am I going to call? I'm going for the coffee on Friday with a guy who lives fifteen minutes from me, and he's in the podcasting world, too. But he's a real friend. Not just a deal, friend. And I think you've got the capacity for three to five of those. Like I don't think you have the capacity for 62 real friends..

[01:18:56.600]

And there's lots of people like, you know, when we throw a party we'll have dozens and dozens of people over, but that intimate little circle that you still track with. I think God actually designed to be small, because you look at Jesus, he had hundreds of disciples, then a group of 70, then 12, then 3, then the 1, and I'm increasingly okay with that. So I'm enjoying these relationships. I love meeting people on the road, talking to people, talking to podcast listeners, meeting people in the Art of Leadership Academy, connecting with my guests, if I'm in a city sometimes, I'll text someone and say, you want to have dinner, uou want to have lunch? Those are great. I also know that when I don't do this anymore, most of those relationships will melt away.

[01:19:40.000]

But I will have, by the grace of God, a few really good friends. Real friends. I don't know. Does that resonate, Mike?

[01:19:46.700]

Mike Evans: It does. I mean I had 4,500 employees at GrubHub, right? And I had some real relationships, people that I talked to every day, right? And people within the company and then outside the company. And it is interesting like, trying to figure out whether losing those relationships were loss, or they were that way by design? Because I am increasingly convinced of the importance of having three to

five great friends. And I'm also aware that there's an epidemic of men 35 to 50 that have zero friends.

[01:20:27.100]

And it's really problematic. And that may be true for women. I just don't know. But like, it's funny because it's almost like an embarrassment of riches when you have hundreds of “deal friends” as you say. And yet it can be very empty if you have zero really close relationships.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah. I agree. And I think even having those categories really helps me sort through. Like you reminded me of a real friend that I'm going to check in on this afternoon after we're done.

Mike Evans: That's awesome. Well then this has been a productive conversation.

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh it's been really good. And I think that's rich. But you're right. God assembled those people at GrubHub for a reason. 4,500. A lot of pastors take it personally because, you know, I've had friends who have left their churches.

[01:21:18.600]

And they go from 50 texts a day to 5. Just like whoa. What just happened? And real friends, deal friends. And I'm not bitter about it. I'm grateful that there are some real friends in the mix.

[01:21:32.000]

Mike Evans: My pastor at the church that I was at when I did GrubHub, this isn't in the book but because I couldn't fit it in the book, but he joined me for eight days on the bike trip in Missouri. And he took a day, he took a Sunday off, which he hadn't done in year, to join. And he's since gone on, and so we don't communicate as much as we did, but I just hung out with him last week or two weeks ago for the first time in like a year. But it is interesting that this issue, it seems like, it's exacerbated for him as a pastor because all of his work and personal relations, they were the same thing. There's no distinction between work and personal relationships for him.

[01:22:15.800]

And I think, from what he said, that's been hard.

Carey Nieuwhof: It is very hard, because, you know, when I was in law, even for that one year, law is what I did, but being a Christian, a husband, a father, that was who I was, and a friend, and then you step into ministry. And suddenly what you do

is also what you believe, and your friends are also the people you serve, or the people you're trying to reach. It gets really confusing. Like, did you go through an identity crisis when you left GrubHub?

[01:22:47.500]

Mike Evans: Yeah. I mean, my email was “GrubHubMike.” So I had to delete that email address. That's digital identity, but on a deeper, less superficial way, still to this day. Separating out, I started a company is different from who I am, which is different from the company I started now, which is also different from who I am. Certainly. And we were built to work. I think were designed to work and to be productive. And to be of use. And so I think it's natural that we derive identity from our work.

[01:23:28.200]

And yet, obviously that can't be everything. And so yeah I had an identity crisis. Who wouldn't? Who wouldn't have an identity crisis after that?

[01:23:39.800]

Carey Nieuwhof: What did that look like, I know we're coming up on time but this is such a good convo. What did that look like and how did you deal with it?

[01:23:48.400]

Mike Evans: The most obvious transition was wealth. I went from not being wealthy to wealthy. And the only defense against greed is giving money away. That's it. That's the only thing that works. You have to give money away, immediately. First thing you do. And so trying to figure out, at first I went through a, “I'm the same person. I just happen to have a bigger bank account. I'm still the guy who will always enjoy the conversation with the kid with the peanut butter sandwich more than anything,” and I'm riding a bike across the country with my tent to prove to myself that it didn't change me, but I was wrong. It actually does. It does change you, and coming to grips with that reality that it's not just a number in the bank, that you make different decisions, and that affects relationships that you have, and trying to come to grips with that instead of looking at it pejoratively, looking at a negatively. That was hard. It's a work in progress, right?

[01:24:53.800]

As a country we're really good at like saying, “rich people are the problem.” And so it kind of sucks being in that group. But like, I know...play me the smallest violin. But yeah, figuring all that out has been challenging, figuring out how much of that I

embrace, and how much of it is separate from me, that's been challenging. But then that's just one part of a lot of things that change. But I think we're all growing in that way. Especially when we change careers, we change jobs, when we go through big life transitions. We have to struggle with that. What are some changes you noticed when you became wealthy? You said it does change you.

[01:25:35.500]

Mike Evans: I mean, I fly business class. It's great. I'm not cramped in economy anymore.

[01:25:41.000]

That was one change. And, I mean, that sounds silly, but I worry about what that means for my daughter who, she's never flown in economy and I worry about what that does for her outlook on life as she grows. And I worry about what that means, in terms of her being quote, spoiled, and trying to find what spoiled means, and all of those things. And so that's been one thing is, like, figuring out, you know, I grew up in this one sort of way where money was tight and my daughter's not experiencing that. And so, that's a really big deal. Like, who am I, who would I want her to be? How do I want to teach her that?

[01:26:21.900]

How do I want to teach her these principles, but I think, you know, more importantly, well, that's important. But another thing that happened was I remember sitting in sermons at church, and we would talk about the tough question which is like, why, when somebody gets cancer, does God not heal? And the answer to that question ends up being, the question why can't be answered and isn't the right question. The question is, what now? We don't ask that same question with the same level of urgency when things go well for us. So GrubHub did great, when a person has big success, it's really easy to convince yourself it was because I'm the architect of my success. I did it. And the answer to the question, why me, is me. Because I'm the best, because I did it, and because I pulled this off, right?

[01:27:20.400]

And whether or not that's true, it's still just as relevant a question as what now? Okay. I've had the success. What's the obligation that comes with it? What does my life look like for the next one day or thirty years, however long I have left on this Earth, right? Like that obligation is just as much incumbent on a person to answer that, the "what now" question, with blessing, as it is with challenges. And it's so easy to avoid the question. So easy to just say, I deserve this, and go buy an island or

whatever. I don't know what people like. But the "what now," the answer to that for me, has been Fixer. I'm trying to create economic viability as an entry path in trades that's gender-inclusive. Right? Like that's the "what now." But that I mean, that's obviously based on my faith principles and it's a conclusion I came to as I went through the bike ride, but that was the biggest change was trying to avoid this, "I deserve this," sort of mentality, and instead just be focused on, what do I use these resources, or if you want to use a biblical term, talents, for? Like what's the obligation that comes with it? You can't just bury it in the ground. Pretty clear principles biblically about that. Like you have to do something with it. You have an obligation that comes with blessing. And I've had so many people be like, "oh, you're blessed because you were good, Mike," and that's not a Biblical concept. You can't find that anywhere in the Bible, right? But you can't find the obligation that comes with blessing. So yeah, I mean, that's been the big transition from a wealth perspective, is it comes with a lot of obligation.

[01:29:06.300]

Carey Nieuwhof: Oof. It feels like a round two for me. This has been a really rich conversation. And I think I agree with you. There are some interesting things we don't get to all the time in this show. Like, I do believe work proceeded the fall, right? God gave Adam and Eve jobs in the Garden of Eden. Go name the animals, that kind of thing. And I used to think that work was part of the curse. No, work got cursed. But it was actually God-ordained. And there appears to be work in Heaven. If you read the Bible.

Mike Evans: Yeah, I mean, there's work in Revelation, too. I don't know how to interpret that book, but there's work in there. I'll say that much.

Carey Nieuwhof: But it's noble, right? And you're right, it always interest me when, and I know a number of these people, some are personal friends, some are podcasts, guests. But who have, "you don't have to lift a finger for the rest of your life," kind of money.

[01:30:01.600]

And then to see them saying, well, I'm trying to do gender-inclusive trade training for people and make a difference. That's really cool. I know another guy who's working in tech for the church, you know. And whenever I see him, I'm like, you could be on a private island somewhere with one of your yachts, and you're not. You're investing at all back. And I think that's really, really true. And it gets to identity, too. And I don't think identity is fused to what we do, but perhaps it springs out of who we are. What we do should spring out of who we are. If you're not

leading a church anymore, okay. You're not leading GrubHub anymore? Okay. I'm not leading church anymore, but I get to do this. And hopefully it makes a difference in someone's life. And maybe there'll be a day where I do something different. But I want to be contributing. You know, at 70, 80, 60, all of those things. It's just a cool conversation, Mike. Any final thoughts?

[01:30:56.500]

Mike Evans: Um, yeah. Well, I put a lot of these ideas in the book. So, if I had a final thought it would be to check out the book. It's called Hangry.

[01:31:06.700]

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah. There it is. A start-up journal. It is not a typical corporate biography. It's somewhat autobiographical and it's a nice Fusion of your corporate life and then the bike ride too. So, always a few pages at the end of most chapters about the ride, but we'll link to it in the show notes. And great cover. Biking up a mountain of pizza. Slice of pizza. It's fantastic.

[01:31:30.300]

Mike Evans: I love the cover. When I saw the graphic designer, I was like, this is magical.

[01:31:35.300]

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, it is. And is it Penguin? Who put it out?

Mike Evans: Hachette.

[01:31:40.200]

Carey Nieuwhof: Right, right, anyway, fantastic, and where can people track with you online these days, find Fixer, find you online.

[01:31:47.500]

Mike Evans: I'm online at mikeevans.com and Fixer is at fixer.com, if you're looking for a handy person membership, because you want somebody to professionally maintain your home.

[01:31:58.500]

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, you want to get your Saturday's back, check it out. And is that just for America or we have global?

[01:32:04.100]

Mike Evans: Yeah, we're in six cities; Chicago, Dallas, Denver ,Phoenix, Seattle, and LA.

Carey Nieuwhof: You picked them well. Well, listen. Mike, thank you so much.

Mike Evans: Tanks for having me. I appreciate it.

[01:32:14.700]

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, that was a great conversation. I enjoyed it. I hope you did as well. I'm going to tell you what's coming up on the podcast. But in the meantime, if you want to get transcripts, or you want to get show notes, simply head over to careynieuwhof.com/episode572. They're there for you absolutely free, including transcripts, which I use on a regular basis. And that's because of you sharing this show. If you enjoyed this episode, please share it with a friend. Just send them the link or give us and Mike a shoutout on social. We'll do our very best to re-post you if we can. And I'm just so grateful for you. Thank you for giving us the ability to do this day after day week after week. We love bringing you top leaders and we love our partners, too. Don't forget to download Belay's latest resource, their book on delegation. Just text my name CAREY to 55123 and get back to doing what you do best with Belay. And what if every dollar donated to your church could go further toward your mission? Overflow offers the lowest cash processing fees in the industry. Learn more at overflow.co/carey.

[01:33:24.600]

Well, we've got a lot of great episodes coming up. Seth Godin is coming back, Frank Bealer, Katelyn Beaty, Chuck DeGroat, Kevin Kelly, I'm so excited for that conversation, Judah Smith, Richard Foster, and a whole lot more, but next episode, we've got Scharrell Jackson and we're going to talk about how to approach a toxic boss, how to change culture in your organization without getting fired, I get that question so often, and how to build a 95% team retention rate. Here's an excerpt:

[01:33:56.200]

Scharrell Jackson: So, when you have an opportunity where you're at the top and you're yielding the results that the organization needs, now you can open the doors for others. And that was the strategy. And ultimately, I was able to bring in so many other African Americans into organizations in which I worked, and create an opportunity for their lives and their family's lives to change, individuals of different

genders and sexual preferences, so that there was an opportunity, but they were all A-players and at the end of the day, this is America.

[01:34:23.200]

And so in America is about the dollar bill, and when people are plugged in and they are A-players and they are creating what most Americans want, which is the yield of return, people don't see color, they see green. And it just isn't working, and unfortunate, and it's not necessarily my life cadence, but ultimately, if we want people to have an opportunity and organizations, and we're not running them, we've got to do what it takes. Not compromise ourselves, but create opportunity and then create some change.

[01:34:52.900]

Carey Nieuwhof: And that's coming up next time on the podcast, if you subscribe, you will never miss a thing. And because you listen to the end, I've got a bonus for you. If you are a communicator and almost all of us are communicators these days. I've put some of my best material into my Preaching Cheat Sheet.

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So even if you're not preaching, this is still going to help you communicate better. And if you are preaching, well, what are you waiting for? Go to preachingcheatsheet.com to get your copy for free. The link will also be available in the show notes. Everybody, thank you so much for listening. I hope you're having a great day and we will catch you next time on the podcast. I hope our conversation today helped to identify and break a growth barrier that you're facing.