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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. Well, one of my perennial favorites, someone I have followed for years, Seth Godin, is back on the podcast and we kind of go all over the place. We talk about his first job at age 14 and why he stopped doing it, why he quit on himself. The best question to ask, Artificial intelligence and the future of work, and how to get your team motivated enrolled, and engaged. Seth has got a new Treatise, a Manifesto, and well, we talked about work and the nature of work. So today's episode is brought to you by the Art of Leadership Academy, this is the academy I started and you're invited. So on June 21st, I'm going to do a live coaching call on attendance versus engagement. If you want to join, you can sign up at the [artofleadershipacademy.com](http://artofleadershipacademy.com).

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Do you know, Seth and I will talk about this, that 36% of employees, say lack of recognition is the top reason they leave their jobs? Leadr would love to solve that for you, go to [leadr.com](http://leadr.com) and mention the promo code, CAREY, you get 20% off your first year when you subscribe that way. So Seth Godin. Oh my goodness, I mean so many people follow Seth and you know that when you type the word, Seth into the internet, and his blog appears, you probably made an impact, and that's what Seth has done for more than 30 years. Seth has been trying to turn on lights, inspire people and teach them how to level up. His blog has been appearing daily for more than a decade. I subscribe and read it every single day. He has spent most of his professional life as a writer, he has published 21 best-selling books, and the latest is, *The Song of Significance*. We've had him on to talk with the practice, and of course, business marketing is a classic. His books have been translated into nearly 40 languages.

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I'm going to have Kevin Kelly on the show soon, and one of the things Kevin says is, don't be the best VD only. I think Seth is a great example. It's like who else does what Seth does? I don't know, but I'll tell you I love this conversation. It got very personal, he was very open. And I'm a huge fan of the Tim Ferriss Show. I know whenever you ask me, hey, what podcasts do you listen to? Tim Ferris. All the time. And we were joking about it. I was driving to the office. My Internet went out in my normal studio,

driving to the church where I used to work and be lead pastor. They let me use their Internet. And as I'm driving in, I see that Tim Ferris, on the day that we recorded this, released his new episode with Seth. And I would suggest you listen to this episode, and then Tim's. We do not cover a lot of the same ground. They're beautiful companions. You will learn so much about Seth and the way he thinks if you listen to them both.

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But hey, thanks for starting here. Well, about a year ago, I started the Art of Leadership Academy and every month, I host a live coaching call and I coach you in that call through some of the most pressing topics in ministry today. So this month on June 21st we'll be discussing attendance versus engagement. So everybody wants better church attendance, but I think there's something going on. I've written about this for years. I want to coach you, specifically on how to get members engaged. And if you do that, guess what, attendance takes care of itself. So if you want to join the live coaching which I do every month, you can sign up at [theartofleadershipacademy.com](http://theartofleadershipacademy.com). In addition, you get all of my courses, things like preaching course, the outreach course, growth course, team leadership course, and a lot more. So I love this. This is where I spend a lot of my time. Go to [theartofleadershipacademy.com](http://theartofleadershipacademy.com), you can get in, on this month's call. Make sure you join before the 21st. The link is also in the description of this episode, wherever you're listening, you're invited. I'd love to see you there. And we are talking about work with Seth Godin.

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What gets recognized gets repeated, and yet too many managers don't offer enough specific, positive feedback, and that is a huge miss when Forbes tells us that 36% of employees say lack of recognition is the top reason they leave their jobs. That's why my friends at Leadr, just added Recognition to their platform to help busy leaders prioritize what really is a fundamental practice. So, go to [leadr.com](http://leadr.com) to learn how you can create a culture of recognition that will engage and retain your staff.

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Be sure to mention the promo code CAREY and you get 20% off your first year with Leadr, that's [leadr.com](http://leadr.com), check it out, use the promo code CAREY and you are in. And now my conversation with the generous, kind, thoughtful, and sweet generis. I think one of a kind, Seth Godin. Here we go.

**Carey Nieuwhof:** Seth, I've been so looking forward to this conversation. Welcome back.

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**Seth Godin:** Thank you. I mark my calendar as soon as you reach out because this is always a treat for me. Thanks for having me.

**Carey Nieuwhof:** Oh well, it's absolutely mutual. And we're gonna talk about work. But there are Seth-isms. I don't know what you call them, that just live in my head. And I mean, I read your blog daily, I subscribe to your email, I've read a lot of what you've written, and I just love the way you think. And it challenges me, but on the Tim Ferriss show, not the most recent appearance, but the one before that, was listening to it in late 2022. And you said something toward the end that really piqued my interest. And then you and I had an offline conversation about it because it really rocked my world. But the the typical question you hear from advice gurus is, what would you do if you knew you couldn't fail? Right? And then go do it. And you argued, perhaps a better question is, what would you do if you knew you would fail?

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And that really spoke to me. I'd love for you to unpack that and, maybe help explain why that is a better question in your mind, because certainly helped me.

**Seth Godin:** Well growing up, you know, certain kind of nerdy kids love to play the genie Three Wishes game. Like The Third Wish should be wishing for more wishes. And like, how do you dissect the question? And the problem with the question of, what would you do if you knew you could not fail, is that you're basically making a wish and you're not paying attention to the reality of what you're doing. And in addition, you're off the hook for the hard work it will take to produce it. And in addition, it's scary, because if you're going to do something, now you have to put your name on it because it's going to work.

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Most of us who are doing interesting work are doing things that probably won't work. When you write a book or a blog post, when you preach a sermon, when you start an institution, it probably won't become bigger than the United Way. It probably won't be remembered the way people remember what Charles Dickens wrote 150 years ago. It's probably not going to work, and so we carry that with us, we carry with it the escape valve of being able to say, well I can do something audacious, because it probably won't work anyway. And we can carry with us the

knowledge that we just signed up to do something hard, something risky, something where feeling like it might not work is part of the point.

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And so the difference between a real stand-up comic and a pretend stand up comic is a pretend stand up comic does the same routine every night, because they have to have it work. And the real stand-up comic understands that the liminal space between the idea in their head in the audience. That's why they do the work.

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**Carey Nieuwhof:** See for me, what was so helpful about that, I was debating, and you and I talked about this. You know, do I serve business leaders, or do I drill down on church leaders? And it was a real, like, three or four months of existential angst and deep thought on a daily basis and lots of consultation with wise people. And you know, the thing about narrowing your audience is it always triggers all kinds of fear. And I know we still have a lot of business leaders listening.

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But I was really drilling down on this whole, am I going to help reverse the decline in the church and help church leaders? And then, you know, your question of, what would you do if you knew it would fail? I imagine myself at 80, 22 years in the future, and I thought, well, if it failed, that was a good life. That was a valiant try. Yeah. Is that the kind of thing you would encourage leaders to think? Like, hey, it was worth it, it didn't work but it was a noble effort.

**Seth Godin:** I mean I just want to put a little aside in, because the words matter, leader and manager. A lot of people listening to this spend most of their day managing.

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They are doing an endless series of chores, they are using authority to get people to do what they want and they are trying at all costs to avoid failure. That's what managers do. That's why Tim Hortons has managers because if they didn't they'd never open on time because people wouldn't show up for their shift. Leaders, that's what we do, is we do work that, if we do it for 20 years and it didn't work we can still say, I'm glad I did it. Because that's the work is to show up even when it's probably not going to work, but it was still worth trying. And I think that there are a lot of latent leaders who have gotten caught up in the trap of managing. And one of the things that you've done with your work, over and over again, is reminded people

why they signed up for this in the first place. And it's not to be a cog in some sort of spiritual machine. It's to be a leader.

**Carey Nieuwhof:** I appreciate that. When you think about your next few decades, is there something that would fit that category for you, when you think about what would you do if you knew you would fail? That noble cause?

**Seth Godin:** So, it's really weird that I get the benefit of the doubt a lot of the time.

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As a struggling entrepreneur for so long, I got the benefit of the doubt none of the time. The expectation was, this is a bad idea for a book, this is a bad idea for a software company. That when we were raising money for one of the first internet companies ever, I got thrown out of so many VC offices, you couldn't even count, right? And now, because I have a track record, people will erroneously assume that I am more likely to succeed the next time, which isn't really true. And so I have to wrestle with the idea that if I'm going to invest in a project, I don't want to waste the benefit of the doubt, and that means I have to pick projects that probably won't work.

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Because to do a project that's certainly going to work, to easily get people to hire them, to easily get it funded, to easily have it. Oh yeah, we did that. What a waste. And so I'm not in a hurry to find my next seven-year project, but it's around the corner and whatever it is, I want it to be generative. I wanted to be filled with respect and dignity in every direction. And I want to be able to point to it when it's done and say, you can put my name on that. Yeah, I'm glad I worked on that.

**Carey Nieuwhof:** What do you mean by generative?

**Seth Godin:** So, mining coal is not generative, in the sense that after the coal is taken out of the mine, there's none left. And after you burn it, you've created this negative by-product.

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Whereas introducing two people you trust to each other so that they can go dance and make something better happen is generative, because the world got better because of that connection that you made, and industrialism paid huge dividends for one hundred years often not by being generative, but by being subtractive, by creating scarcity and burning things. And we are now entering this world where lots and lots of people, not enough people, but lots of people have enough. And if you

have enough, then chopping something up to get more might not be the best use of or talk.

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**Carey Nieuwhof:** Another phrase that keeps echoing in my mind and I think it's become a bit of a refrain in your work because I see it pop up from time to time is "permission to do it again tomorrow." I love that idea. I've repeated that to my team it's like, hey, this maybe didn't work exactly the way we thought, exactly the way we hoped, but we have permission to do this again, tomorrow. Can you talk about how that concept can be, well, first of all, what it means, and secondly, how that can be inspiration to continue doing what you're doing.

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**Seth Godin:** All right, so, I'll start with where it originated from my book, Permission Marketing. So, if a first-time author's coming out with a book, and they hire a publicist, and that publicist spams every single podcasters name they can think of, and spams every influencer's email that they can think of to hustle this new book. Because after all, this is their one big chance.

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I don't want to hear from you again, never mind tomorrow. Ever. They burned down the benefit of the doubt. And when we expand it beyond hustle and promotion, you need \$10,000 more dollars to finish the roofing fund for the new building.

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And you start calling people in a way that doesn't make them want to hear from you again, or you ask for a favor from somebody you really shouldn't be asking for a favor from, because it's urgent, because I need to get this done, but you're not going to be dead when this project is over. You're going to be around after that. How many bridges did you build and how many bridges did you burn down? And so, you know, I've just finished Herbie Hancock's autobiography, you think about Herbie, you think about Miles Davis, between the two of them they made 100 record albums.

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And at least half of them were below average. I don't think Herbie would mind me saying that, but he didn't know which ones would be below average before he finished them. And so the point is that after he made a record, even if it was a sales clunker, he did it in a way that earned him the right to make another album tomorrow. And that's how you build a career, because you are treating your

listeners with respect and saying, I'm going on this journey. Oz might not be to the left. It might be to the right. But let's go find out.

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**Carey Nieuwhof:** Well that goes to what you talked about most recently with Tim Ferriss to 21 books. And the assumption in our culture is almost that every book should outsell the last.

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And you know your your what are your first books was a smash hit out of the gate, and that's tremendously exciting, and probably tremendously deflating at the same time, right? When you're Fleetwood Mac and you know, Rumors comes out, one of the greatest albums of all time. What do you do next?

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**Seth Godin:** Yeah, I've been on a long downward spiral for decades.

**Carey Nieuwhof:** I would not say that.

**Seth Godin:** Now, I will tell you a true story. First about Fleetwood Mac, and then about me. Some people think rumors was Fleetwood Mac's first album, it was their 20th album, give or take, and more than half the people in the group weren't in the group for the first five or ten records. They were a blues band. A really good blues band, and if they had stopped when Peter Green left, they should have been proud of the music they made. They just weren't "the" Fleetwood Mac. And so I begin by saying, overnight success is sort of overrated, because it's usually not. But then the second story I'll tell it actually happened when my Fourth book in my career as an author came out. I was giving a seminar in my office and there were like, 25 people there for the day and my agent, whose office was down the hall, came in with a piece of paper that had just been faxed to her and it was the New York Times bestseller list and my book was on it. And I started to cry. And I didn't start to cry because I had made best-seller. I started to cry because I felt nothing.

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Because I had decided that what achievement was with having a New York Times Bestseller. And when it when it arrived again, I was like, oh. And that was the day I stopped looking at the bestseller list. That was the day I said none of the reviews are why I'm doing this. Did I run into one person or five people, ten people who said, this was the foundational thing for me to get to where I was going. In the writing of it, did I change? And so, if you've talked to my publisher, they will say I've had some

base hits, some doubles, and plenty of strikeouts. But they let me keep playing. I get permission to do it again.

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And I've never had a book that has sold nearly, nearly, with by factor of five or ten, as many copies as Brene Brown, Malcolm Gladwell, or Tim Ferriss, not even close. And that's great because if I did have a book like that, I don't know what would happen if I had to write another one.

**Carey Nieuwhof:** How do you handle that comparison, Seth? Because I think we all play that game in our head, right? My church isn't as big as ... my podcast... Like this podcast has way exceeded my dreams as a hobbyist but, you know, Tim Ferriss is pushing a billion downloads, and my 30 million feels like pocket change compared to that. How does that comparison, because I see you as very focused. The daily blog for decades now that you've been doing.

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I mean you're just very focused on the work and permission to do it again tomorrow and making a huge difference.

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**Seth Godin:** Thank you. But I'm not just saying this stuff because it sounds like there's humility to it. I am really disciplined about making my audience smaller, about being proud of the work, and about relentlessly improving it by my standards. And I have insulated myself from so many of the false proxies that other people think are making them successful, that I don't know how many people follow me on Facebook. I haven't opened my Facebook account in months, and I stopped tweeting under the new regime because it's just like, well, I don't even want to be part of this done, and I don't spend a minute saying, how do I get more Instagram followers?

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Because I don't want to work for those numbers. And I don't want to work for those people. It's instead saying, I have this opportunity, this moment, where some people, sight unseen will buy five copies of my book just because they know I wrote it. What an obligation on my part. And what a privilege. And it's enough. I don't need more people. I just need enough people to be able to do this practice. And if there's a positive side effect that spreads, that's great. But that's not what I'm keeping track of.

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**Carey Nieuwhof:** I wonder how that's related to real art. So I read this graphic about how, and I should have shared it with you, but I literally discovered it 24 hours ago and I'm putting it out of my newsletter, Seth. But um, of about people like Dickens, Victor Hugo, Maya Angelou. And it was basically their daily disciplines.

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And if you look at it, I think Beethoven composed eight hours a day, Tchaikovsky, two or four hours a day, that was it. And when you look at their work, there isn't a whole lot of busy work. They are walking in the garden, having a meal with a friend, taking a nap in the middle of the day. Honoré De Balzac actually was the opposite of that. He worked 13 hours a day and drank 50 cups of coffee to get them through the day, which is a whole other story. So assuming some of this is remotely true, it was a very interesting study. There is a connection between changing the channel, turning off the noise, and actually producing art. And it made me think, like Van Gogh never sold a painting in his lifetime. He had patrons, right? But his art had no value during his lifetime. And a lot of people who really produce art that endures for the centuries, were not particularly successful

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They just got permission to keep doing it. When you think about changing the channel, another phrase you used last time you were on the podcast, and tuning out the noise and creating a bit of slack in your work and time to reflect. How does that all contribute to genius, in your view, not genius, but like meaningful work. Let's call it meaningful work.

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**Seth Godin:** If you've got three hours we can dissect this the best I can but I'll try to make it short.

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**Carey Nieuwhof:** I'm like that isn't even a question, but I know you'll turn it into something.

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**Seth Godin:** We've been so indoctrinated that even someone as mindful as you used the word successful to describe people who weren't famous or who weren't rich from their art. But you can bet that they were successful.

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It was only recently, like one hundred years, that if you weren't born rich, you could make art for a living, that the authors you talked about, the people who were doing paintings in the 1800s, 1700s, 1600s. It wasn't a job. It was something that you figured out how to do, all the way up to Aaron Copeland who sold insurance for years or was an actuary. And then when mass media comes along and commercializes stuff, and top forty, and program directors, and curators, and all the rest of it, it just became one more job. And we say Michael Jordan was a successful basketball player, and Jasper Johns was a successful painter. But those words don't mean the same things in those sentences. The only way to be good at Michael Jordan's job is to beat the other team.

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That is the purpose of competitive basketball. There isn't competitive painting, and so, when I think about someone who's trying to shepherd a spiritual institution, if you are looking out of the corner of your eye at a mega institution that has 20 times as many people paying dues or tithing, whatever it is, and thinking you want to be that?

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You might be playing the wrong game.

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But if you are playing the right game, you need to start playing by different rules, because the rules that takes to put a hit on the pop chart are different. So what Joni Mitchell did, fellow Canadian, is she willfully and intentionally put out records like Mingus and Hegira, so that the people who liked Circle Game would stop buying her records.

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Because she didn't want to be an oldies act playing more and more versions of Circle Game, even though she could've sold 20 times as many records, she wanted to sit with Jocko and Herbie and make a jazz record that had vocals in it, and she did. And there are plenty of people who didn't do that. Carly Simon didn't do that. And so you get to make these choices whether you have commercial success or not. And it's not just whether using music or paint, it's whether you're leading an institution. So you know, when I was busy building a Kimbo, which isn't mine anymore, I knew exactly what people would happily sign up for, which is to do masterclass type lectures that weren't very difficult for people to consume, that cost \$49 so they could say they did

it. I would have reached 50 times as many people and it would've been a tenth the amount of work.

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But you've rarely run into someone who took masterclasses. Oh yeah. I'm a successful screenwriter now because Aaron Sorkin talked to me for twenty five minutes. That's very unlikely. And so if you're going to give up as much as you give up to be a spiritual leader, don't sell out at the last minute because you want another 400 people in the room. Figure out how to be missed if you were gone, to create the kind of community that is off the charts when it comes to making a difference. When I was growing up, my Dad was on the board of the Black Baptist church in Buffalo. And um, when you talk to people who were members of that congregation, 400, 300, it's the most important thing in their life. And if you walk down the street to the place that two holidays a year had a huge line out the door, you can take it or leave it. We'll just go someplace else if this place is too full and that feels to me like the fork in the road.

**Carey Nieuwhof:** Feel free to move on to the next question but I've got to ask because you mentioned it. How did your dad end up on the board of the Black Baptist Church in Buffalo, Seth?

**Seth Godin:** My parents were extraordinary humans. My dad was the volunteer head of the United Way and his full-time job was, he owned a factory in Buffalo that makes Hospital cribs. My sister now runs it after he passed away. And it was UIW, organized work force, bending steel, welding, the whole deal, and Mary, who was his head of sales, was a deacon in the church, and the church hit hard times. And my dad said, we can't let this fade, so he stepped in and did his MBA thing to help them. He never, he wasn't a parishioner or anything, he just thought he could help.

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**Carey Nieuwhof:** That's extraordinary. Man. Thank you for sharing that. This phrase has been circling around a lot of what we talked about, and it's in your new book, *The Song of Significance*, and I'd love to spend a few minutes on it, "race to the bottom." That's what we're trying to avoid.

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What I've appreciated, I mean, there's a lot that I've appreciated so far in the conversation, I think where you've taken it so far. I think a lot of people end up with, you know, once they have a pattern. For example, you're now on book 21, there's a temptation to become a character of yourself.

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I have to be what I was in 1999 or 2008 and now I just have to find the 2023 iteration of it.

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Or a preacher who's two decades into the sermon going, my glory days are behind me. I just have to reinvent. But it's Joni Mitchell going, alright. We're gonna do something completely different here. Which I think is great. But the companion to that, or an opposite to that would be no, we're just gonna race to the bottom. That's a phrase that shows up a lot in your work. What do you mean by race to the bottom? And what's at stake in that race?

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**Seth Godin:** So let's put a pin in the caricature of yourself part, because I think it's worth coming back to that. But the race to the bottom. It's easily understood if you think about Walmart, Canadian Tire, or Amazon. If you could pick anyone. There's twenty items, this one's dollar cheaper. You should buy it. Some people will deliver to you in four days we'll deliver to you in two.

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Some people won't give you credit, we'll give you credit. If you have the lowest prices, the fastest delivery, the easiest credit terms, and generic mediocre products, you will gain market share, for sure. And the problem with that, is that if you're racing to the bottom, you might win, which means you have to keep cutting corners, keep making it more convenient, keep making it less moving or touching because that's not convenient. And worse, you can come in second which means you've raced all the way to the bottom and got none of the prizes, because someone down the street has a drive-through window and you don't. So when we think about the landmarks in our lives, and as more than half my life a vegetarian, I'm allowed to talk about Paul Weber's. As you know Paul Weber's is right down the street from you. Weber's hamburger stand did not race to the bottom.

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They have not tried to cut the price of what they sell. They have not tried to create an ordering system that's less idiosyncratic than the one they have. They have not tried to switch to induction cooktops, instead of fire, they've just made it in and of itself, actually a caricature of what it was, because they've exaggerated all the things that they stand for. And so, when we think about serving the bigger audience, we

say, let's dumb it down. Let's make it cheaper. Let's make it simpler. Let's make it easier. And the problem with doing that, is you become as Zig would say, a wandering generality.

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And the people who have built careers and who make a difference, are racing to the top. They're saying, you'll pay a lot, but you get more than you pay for. You might have to drive five minutes out of your way to get here, but it's worth driving twenty minutes out of your way to get here. They're saying that you expect a lot, but it's gonna still surprise you. That takes so much effort to do that. So yeah. A caricature of yourself, going one step further down a road that other people, who don't want to do the work, are unwilling to go down.

**Carey Nieuwhof:** Anything else on a caricature of yourself?

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By the way, Weber's Hamburgers is just north of Valeria, Ontario on the way to Muskoka and Algonquin Park, another area that we love and have in common. And I think it started the year. I was born 1965.

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Paul Weber launched a little Hamburger Stand and it was so popular, and basically they serve nothing but hamburgers and fries. That's all you're going to get. Maybe they have a veggie burger now, Seth. I think they might. But it became so popular they had to put a bridge across the divided highway to allow people, not to get killed, going to get hamburgers. And they're still going. I think it finally got sold, but I knew Paul's kids, our kids played hockey together and the Weber's still owned Weber's for many, many years and it's absolutely legendary in this part of the country.

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**Seth Godin:** Yeah. One year the bus up to Ccmp made the mistake of stopping at Weber's instead of Gravenhurst for stupid sandwiches, and the bus driver didn't think about the fact that they used to have free matchbooks, so the camp almost burned down.

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Dozens of kids showed up to camp with matchbooks.

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**Carey Nieuwhof:** Almost burned down Algonquin Park. That's funny. I did not know that. That's great.

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**Seth Godin:** You were asking about caricatures. Sometimes if someone has dinner with me at my house, they might notice that I'm not like I am in public. I'm not that different but I'm not "on." When I am in public I am playing the role of what would Seth Godin do right here, I am a caricature of an actual human being named, Seth Godin.

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And it's a performance. The same way putting on your clothes is a performance. And one of the things that I love about ancient spiritual traditions is they were totally into the costumes and the hats, because the costumes in the hats are caricatures. They are saying, I am not here as the person you had breakfast with yesterday. I'm here wearing the thing because this is the role. And we shouldn't deny that because we need stories in order to make decisions. In order to move forward. And those stories aren't once upon a time. Those stories are the clues and the hints of, what are things like around here? What culture are we building? And you know, if your caricature is that there's always a special funky handshake when someone meets you, that handshake will change their emotional state.

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And you can't just not do it when you don't feel like it, because your caricature in that moment when you are playing that role, that's what we do. We tell stories that change people.

**Carey Nieuwhof:** Boy, I want to go in a number of different directions, maybe one more, then we're going to talk about work, what are some differences you think people would now notice if they showed up at your house for dinner?

**Seth Godin:** I feel like Seth Godin with a capital S and a capital G is supposed to fill the silence, ask interesting questions, and inject energy to the interaction.

[00:34:13.000]

People don't retain me to come give a speech because they need a low-key way to bridge the gap before the coffee hour, right? Whereas if I'm paddling in my canoe with somebody I'm not talking nonstop. And being in the room with other people, as

a peer, is different than making pronouncements, which I add hyperbole to all the time because that's my job. And if I add hyperbole to something and you say, well, that's 80% true, at least I got you to think about it, right? And so, I understand that I'm doing my work when I do that, and I chose to do it. You know, I shaved my head a really long time ago.

[00:34:54.700]

First in solidarity with my dad's illness and second because I was building my Internet company by giving speeches. And I was the odd, fast-talking, bald guy on stage. And that was my hat. That was my caricature. And I don't know what would happen if I grew my hair back, some of it would probably come back. Wouldn't be at full head of hair or like you, sir. But you know, these are choices that we make if we want to be on the hook to make a difference.

**Carey Nieuwhof:** Thanks for sharing so openly. I really appreciate it. And I didn't know about your Dad's journey. That must have been a tough season.

**Seth Godin:** Mom, too. Yeah. Thank you.

**Carey Nieuwhof:** Ah, your mom, too, man. So sorry.

[00:35:39.500]

Seth, switching gears a little bit. Your latest project is a Treatise. It's a rant, it's a promise, it's about work. I was trying to come up with adjectives to describe it and I'm like, this is a really fine piece of work and I appreciated reading an early copy. Let's start here. What is wrong with the way that we work today, and what has work become?

**Seth Godin:** I think a long time ago, the purpose of work was to enable humanity, to enable culture, to enable us to survive and thrive. And when machines came along, we optimized the machines to produce more productivity. And those machines don't have to look like robots. There's plenty of machines like, you know, seats that fall down when you push them, and pop back up. Makes it more efficient to get people in and out, it's a machine.

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And then we started to optimize people, and we bought into Milton Friedman's fraud about what the purpose of a company is, which is to maximize shareholder value. He just made that up. And suddenly people were a resource They were a machine to be optimized. To figure out how to get more outcome.

[00:36:53.100]

And then when competition kicks in and public markets kick in, suddenly the purpose of culture is to enable companies, not the other way around.

[00:37:02.400]

And so we've built this horizontal infrastructure of billions of people who go to work and are surveilled.

[00:37:11.400]

Their keystrokes are counted. The number of units, they can pack in a box are counted. We are racing to push people as hard as we can, to get as much as we can, for as cheap as we can.

[00:37:23.000]

For a long time, we put up with it because it was the North American dream. Do what you're told, and do what you're told, and in forty years from now, you can retire from Stelco with a pension. But the companies stopped keeping their end of the bargain. They started changing the rules, laying people off, brutalizing people, billionaires publicly firing people who are handicapped, disabled, on Twitter in front of everybody else just for fun. And so a whole generation is coming along saying, don't count us in. We are not interested in that deal. And there is now this real fork in the road about what is work even for? And I think what people are saying to spiritual leaders like you, and to bosses is, I'm looking for meaning, where is the meaning? Because I have enough stuff. And I think that we can get back to work providing meaning for people.

[00:38:23.500]

**Carey Nieuwhof:** You raised a couple times, particularly your dad, but I've heard you talk about your mom before, as extraordinary people. Because this is a treatise on work. What did you learn from your parents about work? Because it seems early on, this has been a song that you've sung a rallying cry. A subject you keep coming back to in your work.

[00:38:45.000]

**Seth Godin:** It's funny because one of my sister's heard a podcast I was on and she said, "I'm not saying you were making stuff up, but my sister and I lived in the same house as you, and we don't have the same experience you had." So they also had



great childhoods, but we tell ourselves stories. Our origin story, the fuel that we use to make decisions,

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And so I remember things like like my dad sponsored, with my mom, more than a dozen Russian refugees in the 1970s to escape the Soviet Union. And they came to our house every holiday, smoking like chimneys, they weren't they weren't people that we would ordinarily be hanging out with, right? That felt normal. It felt normal for my mom to turn her volunteer gig into a full-time gig, into something that made a huge impact on the community. That's just what I thought everybody did.

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And we weren't, I mean, in Buffalo even now you don't have to make an enormous amount of money to live in a decent house, in this house, but we weren't super rich.

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We were well off, we were privileged people in the community, but the amount of responsibility my parents felt was really significant, important. And so I started my first business when I was fourteen. And then I did another one when I was fifteen. And I started a ski club when I was sixteen, and this, again, my parents didn't save the day. My parents didn't invest. My parents didn't tell me what to do. They just let me do things that would fail. And there was this expectation that the purpose of the project isn't, how much money did you make doing that? The purpose of the project was, did you have fun at ski club last night? The ski club that wouldn't have existed if you hadn't started it. That the point of it wasn't how you're going to make money. I probably made \$600 dollars the first year. The point was, there needs to be a ski club and no one starting one. Why not?

[00:40:55.900]

**Carey Nieuwhof:** What was your first business at 14?

**Seth Godin:** So it's amazing how the patterns come around. It was about patterns. I had access to the mainframe computer at the University of Buffalo and they had a program on it that would print out on a dot matrix printer your biorhythms, which was based on this false theory that we have a social biorhythm, a physical biorhythm, and a work by biorhythm. And when they're all triple low, you better stay home that day. It's like horoscopes but with graphs, right? And so, the PBS auction in Buffalo used to be really fun to watch. They would auction off stuff and you'd call in. So I donated 5 biorhythms to the auction.

[00:41:45.200]

**Carey Nieuwhof:** At the age of 14.

**Seth Godin:** At the age of 40, I wrote up some copy and I mailed it in.

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“If you buy this, you will send your birth date to the donor and they will run your custom report,” and people bid a lot and the auction made, I don’t know, \$300.

[00:42:00.700]

I’m thinking to myself, well, this is interesting. So the people who got one from the auction would send me a note saying, “can I have one for my brother here’s his birthday.” I had \$25. So I was selling these biorhythms, which I was pirating to the University of Buffalo and after I sold like four, this is a vague memory, after I sold like four, I got a letter from one of my customers thanking me, explaining what an impact it had on them. And that on a triple zero day, they had broken their leg, and their cousin had gotten bad medical news. So now they needed more.

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And I was like, I’m out. I’m out.

[00:42:40.600]

I thought this was entertaining. You don’t think is entertaining. I’m done.

[00:42:48.200]

**Carey Nieuwhof:** So you had that ethical switch that went off at the age of fourteen.

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**Seth Godin:** Yeah.

[00:42:54.200]

**Carey Nieuwhof:** Isn’t that incredible? Man, thank you for sharing that. Free access to a mainframe computer. You and Bill Gates. I mean, isn’t that Bill Gates’ origin story, like in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade?

[00:43:03.900]

**Seth Godin:** Yeah. My dad volunteered as a professor at the University of Buffalo, so he would bring me along and I just sit there while he was doing his thing. And it was one of the easy projects.

[00:43:15.100]

**Carey Nieuwhof:** So you say in your book, Seth, that the nature of work changed significantly just over one hundred years ago when Frederick Taylor and Henry Ford came along and changed the nature of work. And that's still echoing in offices today, which I find fascinating, and even in remote offices.

[00:43:32.100]

Can you explain what got revolutionized in work and how that's still impacting, even those of us who work remotely, or for companies?

**Seth Godin:** So Ford had worked hard to make his machines better. The reason that you could get a Model T in any color you wanted as long as it was black, isn't because Henry Ford liked that color. It's because black paint dried two hours faster than any other color. So he can make the assembly line go faster. But then he met Frederick Taylor and Frederick Taylor carried a stopwatch, and Taylor showed Ford that if you used to stopwatch to measure every movement of every employee, you could speed up the assembly line.

[00:44:17.000]

And if you sped it up, you could lower the price of the car. So, someone visited the Ford plant shortly after that, and coined the phrase, jerking people around. Where that phrase comes from is that you saw people on the assembly line who looked like they were marionettes, being jerked this way and that. Like they'd been wound up that morning and they were under complete control. So, let's fast forward 100 years, and we've got many businesses who are making employees who are working from home have their camera on at all times, are counting every keystroke, are rewarding people for how many clicks their writing gets, or whatever it is. It's the same thing. the difference, and I don't mean to show a lack of empathy here, but the difference is if someone putting together a Ford Model T in 1926 doesn't care about their job, the car is probably going to run okay anyway.

[00:45:13.200]

But now, if you're pushing people to connect, to engage with customers, to innovate, to solve interesting problems, to be better than a mediocre AI, and they don't care, they're not going to do it. And so we need this enrollment because we have to

acknowledge anyone who works for you is doing it voluntarily. They have to work somewhere, but they don't have to work for you.

[00:45:40.100]

**Carey Nieuwhof:** You know the surveillance economy. I mean, right now, as we record this, there's a big back and forth, Seth, between CEOs, owners of businesses, bosses, "You gotta come back to the office." And there's almost this idea that if I can see you, I can control you. If I can see you, I can measure you. If I can see you. And that's Taylor-ism or the remnants of Taylor ISM.

[00:46:03.500]

And, you know, the the opposite and you're reading articles, you're posting about this to, you see companies now, installing surveillance, like we're going to monitor your keystrokes, we're going to monitor your productivity. What are the downsides of that? What are the challenges of that, apart from some kind of, like, big brother for that world that we living?

[00:46:25.500]

**Seth Godin:** I think I want to ask, what are the upsides? I mean, like, if you're running an airline, I hope you are managing things very closely. I do not want Pilots making stuff up as they go along. I do not want flight attendants inventing new safety techniques in midair, right? Those people have signed up for a job where there is low trust and high stakes, and that's known in advance.

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But the best work that most humans want is high trust and high stakes, but it's not trusting to use surveillance techniques. What's useful is to say, let's see the work.

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Are we solving the problem? Are we producing the output that needs to be produced? Not all the intermediate steps. So, years ago my very first job was at a software company and the guy who ran the software team had a long history in computers, and he said, let me tell you about this guy I used to work with. He sat in his office every day for six hours doing absolutely nothing. Just staring out the window. And then he would spend half an hour typing up code and it was always bug-free.

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Now if you're measuring blinds of code written, the person down the hall who's making a rat's nest of mistakes and things that are going to take months to fix, or this guy who is doing it in his head. Who's the better performer? We've gotta measure the right things. So if you say say to the people in the call center, we are measuring how many calls you answer per hour. They will figure out that the single best way to make that number go up is to hang up on people who are difficult, because people who are difficult will make their numbers go down. On the other hand, if you're saying, we're measuring how many difficult customers don't quit our firm because we showed up as humans and connected with them. That's what people will do. So, surveillance in itself isn't evil. What's evil is when it is not aligned with the purpose that we brought to work. It's when it's used against us, there's a problem.

[00:48:44.000]

**Carey Nieuwhof:** So you ask 10,000 in 99 countries to describe the conditions at the best job they ever had. What did you learn?

**Seth Godin:** Well it's an interesting thing, Carey, everyone I've ever asked could tell me what the best job they ever had was. Every single person. We all know, it's like tell me about your first date, tell me about the best job you ever had. Everyone has an answer. I gave him 14 choices. I picked the two that bosses think the answers are, which is, I got paid a lot and I didn't get fired. Because if you talk to bosses, those are the only two dials they ever turn to deal with retention and hiring. Those two came in last, and the ones that came at the top were, "I accomplish more than I thought I could. people treated me with respect, and I did work that I was proud of."

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And when we think about the kinds of folks who have chosen to be the kinds of folks who listen to this podcast, too often we seduce ourselves into getting rid of all three of those things in our job, even though we're the boss, because we're afraid, because we don't want to lean out of the boat. We want to just keep going straight down this risk-free path, back to the race to the bottom, but what people have told me around the world, and every age is, no, I don't want to go on the safe, proven path where I'm a cog in the machine. What I actually want to do is blow myself away by encountering something that felt like an obstacle, and then exceeding it.

[00:50:22.500]

**Carey Nieuwhof:** You argue we're in the midst of a significance revolution. I love that phrase. Can you explain that? Like what do you mean by that, Seth?

**Seth Godin:** So, the industrial revolution is simple. If you have the best industry, you win. That Henry Ford destroyed all the other car companies, by a lot, because his cars were one-third the price or less.

**Carey Nieuwhof:** And there were hundreds of them weren't there, at the turn of the century, car companies?

**Seth Godin:** Yeah. Hundreds. And then in the 1960s, it was the industrial revolution turned itself to data. And if you could figure out how to process information faster and better than other people, you would win. And then it became okay, well now it's this convenience race to the bottom of Amazon. And how do I bring computers to the job so I can become more efficient. Well, what comes after that?

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Because once you've got rid of all the jobs, what are you going to do? How are you going to beat the competition there?

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Well, it's because you're going to zig when everyone else zags, it's because you're going to solve interesting problems, it's because you're going to treat people in a way that makes them want to pay you extra for what you do.

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These are all things that are created by people who found meaning in their work and offered your customers a sense of meaning and connection and significance. So that is the competitive advantage. So I'm not arguing that we should sort of lay back.

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Let people take off Tuesdays Thursdays and Prime Fridays.

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What I'm saying is we should relentlessly improve the work but never criticize the worker because this isn't about gaining ownership or control over people, it's about solving a useful problem.

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**Carey Nieuwhof:** How do you separate the work from the worker? You know, that's sort of a big phrase, a big idea, never criticize the worker. What does that look like in Practical day-to-day terms?

[00:52:16.300]

**Seth Godin:** So The Carbon Almanac taught me a whole bunch of things. And one of the things that we discovered is, if you've got 300 volunteers, who can come and go as they please, and you are trying to produce a footnoted authoritative document, you can't just say to people, oh, you did it so it's fine. And so we early on created a culture that said, the best thing that could happen to a paragraph you write or chart you create, is that someone here improves. And if you're not okay with that you shouldn't stay here. This is what we do around here. We don't view this as an assault or personal criticism. You are not the chart, you are not the paragraph. We have heroes. We know what a perfect page looks like.

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How can we get this closer to that? And what we have done in typical management situations is the person giving feedback has to exercise authority. And the way they exercise authority is not by saying, we have an objective standard here. They're saying, I'm the boss. I'm better than you. Do what I say. And that's not useful because it undermines the very thing you are looking for people to do. And so, let's get real, let's not play, also includes things like, we use the Oxford comma around here. I don't even know what the Oxford Comma is, but people are obsessed about that. "We use the Oxford comma around here. We're not going to discuss the Oxford comma. This is how we may make it better. There's Oxford commas, yes or no." And the same thing is true if we're looking for, you know, number of flops in a computer chip. I don't care who designed the computer chip. If it has more flops and is more efficient it's a better computer chip. That's what we're gonna do.

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Leave your notebooks open when you go home at night. Other people are going to improve your work, and tomorrow, it's going to be even better. That's what we signed up for.

**Carey Nieuwhof:** One of the real active open discussions, and probably will be indefinitely, is AI versus Humans. So most people listening to this have dabbled in AI, and by the way, I've loved your podcast episodes and your writing on that as well. There's now an AI Seth that you can ask a question to, we will link to that in the show notes, and it's a custom build right now, but at some point, I'm sure that will become more wide stream available. But when you think about the unique contribution of humans today and perhaps as far as you can see in the future, it's changing so fast.

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People are terrified that AI is going to take away their jobs. Writers, creatives, in particular artists. What is the human contribution? Where do you see AI versus human sifting out in the near future?

[00:55:02.100]

**Seth Godin:** So in Thomas Edison's lifetime, we had a huge challenge in North America. We have to lay an enormous number of cables to electrify all the homes, and there was this huge battle between George Westinghouse and Thomas Edison because electricity was basically viewed as a magic trick.

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I can't remember who is on which side, but AC vs DC, and the person who wanted DC power, I think it was Edison, got some elephants and electrocuted them in public to make people afraid of AC power. And then when the power finally came to people's homes, it wasn't in a wall socket hung from the ceiling like a lightbulb. That was where the Edison Mount came from. And when they introduced the clothes washer, there was no place to plug it in. You had to unscrew the lightbulb and screw in the connector for the machine. Which would be sort of ludicrous, except the machines were early machines. They weren't very well balanced and they would rock and walk across the room, and more than a dozen people were killed by their washing machine strangling them as it moved around.

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So, that's what electricity was. And if you did a job where electricity was going to make your job spectacularly different, you could easily say electricity is going to replace all our jobs.

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And in many ways it did, and the car replaced many blacksmith's jobs. So the short-term impact of AI is either an AI works for you, or you're competing with one. If you are competing with one, you've got troubles, an AI can read an x-ray better than a radiologist in 90% of the cases.

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I don't think that if you're a radiologist, you want to be opposed to that, you want to figure out, how do I get AI to work for me so that I can become a different kind of radiologist?



[00:57:15.600]

If you are a writer asking ChatGPT for twenty possible subtitles for your book isn't cheating. It's exactly what you should do because you still have to decide that what we do for a living going forward is, we make decisions and we ask good questions and we make connections and array things together. Not do chores. Because if a chore can be profitably done by an AI, it will.

[00:57:46.400]

**Carey Nieuwhof:** How do you use technology so far? And again, you know, we're mid-2023 here as we discuss this. So if you're listening in 2025, I'm sure the answer will be different, but time stamping it now. How are you using it? Not using it? What do you see as its potential?

[00:58:02.700]

**Seth Godin:** So a few months ago, I asked ChatGPT to write some blog posts, and I was thrilled that they rhymed with mine, but they weren't me. So I could go back to my work. When I trained, working with Eleven Labs, my voice, using six hours of audiobook, my wife can't tell it's not me talking. And what that led me to understand is if I'm going to do anything with my voice, I have to be more of a caricature of myself. If not, I might as well just have Eleven Labs do it for me. Mediocre versions of me are now worthless. They're easily replicated.

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I believe the two biggest shifts that people aren't understanding, about AI is, first one is, it's always on, which is not true for any other form of interaction that we can have. So if we think about talk therapy, we have a 50-minute hour because it's such a slap to get to the doctor and schedule the whole thing and everything else. But once ChatGPT can do basic Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, you can do it 20 times a day, whenever you need it.

**Carey Nieuwhof:** I hadn't thought about that.

**Seth Godin:** But of course that's how it should be done. You shouldn't save it up for a week, right? It's, "oh, I'm stressed," and it says something to you right in that moment so that you can develop a new pattern, right? And the second thing is, how much cheaper it is than humans, because when we think about email, nobody I know used to send as many handwritten letters as they send emails now, right? Because it's handy, just go, this is how we communicate. Well, AI is going to be like that. It's going to be in every little corner, all the time, always on helping with tiny

little things. It's not going to be a giant robot that looks like a person Android thing from an Isaac Asimov novel. It's going to be this ubiquitous thing that combines service with surveillance but as long as it is giving people value they're going to use it.

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And so the last part of my rant is lots of people now walk around with earbuds, usually the white ones. And what happens when it's whispering in your ear? And it's telling you who that person across the table is because it recognizes them. And it's telling you the last time you talked to them and it's telling you that somebody a block walk away you went to McMaster University with 40 years ago, and if you hurry, you can go meet up with them. There's all these things it's gonna whisper to us all the time.

[01:00:52.200]

**Carey Nieuwhof:** Okay. So eleven labs. We'll link to the episode of your podcast, which I assume was, Eleven Labs and spoiler alert, it was all AI-generated voice and AI-generated Seth. So now you know the end of the movie before you hear the movie. If you missed that episode, was that Eleven Labs, that one?

[01:01:09.800]

**Seth Godin:** Yeah.

[01:01:11.200]

**Carey Nieuwhof:** Yeah, so your wife can't tell the difference between generic Seth and the real Seth, and you're saying I forget the adjective you used, a more animate, more caricatured version. What is your secret sauce now that makes you different than that AI-version of Seth?

[01:01:27.800]

**Seth Godin:** What it reminded me is, if I'm going to show up in front of another person with my voice, I have to put more into it because now there's an alternative that sounds a lot like me, but is free. So if you're going to do it, it's like when Milli Vanilli got in trouble for playing the music of their songs and lip-syncing it on stage. Well, that's what people came to hear, so what's the problem? The problem is what people came to hear was them putting in the effort, not the words.

[01:02:07.700]

**Carey Nieuwhof:** Oh, that's good. Milli Vanilli and AI. I think that's a post right there, Seth, that's awesome. Okay, anything else about AI? You also talk in The Song of Significance about our new tools; Zoom meetings, the gig economy, there are a lot of things right now that can feel dehumanizing, and yet you built The Carbon Albinac completely remote. Not meeting the vast majority of the people that you collaborated with, for what I thought was a spectacular work. So talk about the dehumanizing and yet the inevitable, as our mutual friend, Kevin Kelly, would say, the inevitable. This is where work is going. We are communicating, you're in New York, I'm north of Toronto, and we're communicating through this dehumanizing technology and yet having, what feels to me, like a very human conversation. So what do we do in the midst of these, you know, dehumanizing humanizing moments with technology and our tools?

**Seth Godin:** I don't find this dehumanizing one bit. I find the fact that I get to know you, that I get to have a conversation like this one, is a thrill. So let's again talk about tools. When Alexander Graham Bell came out with the telephone, there was a crisis. Because people of privilege, which were the only ones who could afford a telephone, did not speak to someone unless they were introduced by their Butler or mutual third party. That's what calling cards were for. So if you rang someone on the phone and this box is ringing, what do you say when you pick it up? And so Alexander Graham Bell said, you should say "Ahoy." And he was going to try to create.

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**Carey Niewhof:** Sorry, this is news to me. Ahoy.

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**Seth Godin:** This is great stuff, this is just great stuff because "ahoy" was what one yachtsman would say to another who they didn't know, as they passed on their boat. And Thomas Edison took him aside and said, that's not going to fly, and they decided on "hello" which did not mean what it means now, as the universal thing of "you are now welcome to talk to me."

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And so Zoom shows up during covid.

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I'd been using Zoom for five years before that, but a lot of people were uncomfortable with it. During covid it was a lifeline. If you think about the fact that a worldwide pandemic on the scale of the Spanish Flu, put a bump into our economy

that wasn't very big, that enabled us to go to work without leaving our homes, it was astonishing.

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But if you misuse it and you say, I'm taking attendance and there's 16 people on this screen and I'm going to talk and talk and make stuff up as I go along for half an hour, because that's how long it says on Outlook.

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Well, of course that's dehumanizing, but it would be just as dehumanizing if we did that in person. What happens when we use it properly, not to have a meeting but to have a conversation, is magic can happen. And then if I add to it the AI that's listening to us turning it into a transcript, understanding the transcript, writing a summary, sending a follow-up note so that we can then have another human conversation with another human in ten minutes that we need to have.

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There will be plenty of humanity if we want it. But if we're hiding because we've been indoctrinated to sit in the back row to be behind a piece of glass to not extend ourselves, then it's dehumanizing. But I don't think the technology itself is. I think that's a choice.

[01:05:48.700]

**Carey Nieuwhof:** Thanks for those stories too. I love it when I hear stories like ahoj versus hello. I've never heard them before. Your sources are impeccable and it's just fantastic Seth. Anything else on the difference between management and leadership?

[01:06:04.500]

**Seth Godin:** So let's go back to it one more time. Because the smart, generous people who are listening to this, glossed over it. They said, well, I'm a manager, so I'm a leader.

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And I'm like, no you're not, you're almost certainly not, and you have authority vested in you by many forces and you are using that authority to create a thing the way you want it to be, but that is not leadership.

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Leadership is voluntary, and who is voluntarily choosing to eagerly participate in the change you want to make.

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So there's a non-profit in New Rochelle called the Fuller Center.

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It used to be called Habitat for Humanity. And what happens with the Fuller Center is the community comes together to build houses for people. Because if you want to make sure that people aren't homeless, having them have a home is a really good way to do that. And they do incredible work in contributing to the community.

[01:07:12.000]

But the people who make it work are volunteers, you can't order people around and say you must come to this build. Once you're on the build, you can say we're done working on this window, now we're going to work on the roof because you have earned that management privilege through your leadership, but they volunteered to be there, and they didn't volunteer because they were shamed into doing it. They volunteered because they wanted to do it, and many people in the spiritual line of work got into it because they wanted to lead, but the indoctrination, which has the word doctrine in the middle of it, has pushed people to ask, will this be on the test?

[01:07:59.400]

Am I coloring inside the lines? What will my critics say?

[01:08:02.900]

How do I avoid somebody speaking up against me?

[01:08:07.500]

And there's one institution in my town where six influential members got upset at the person who was leading it over a trivial issue, I think about parking. And they said, we need to change this and we need to change lots of other things about how things are around here. And he said, this might not be the place for you. And I'm happy to make an introduction to you to that place over there. Because that's how their style is. But around here, this is the way we do things. And when you are willing to have people leave because they're not involved in the journey, you are probably leading. But if you need figure out how to use every force your disposal to keep people, you're probably managing.

[01:09:04.500]

**Carey Nieuwhof:** That's a beautiful segue into enrollment and that's a major theme in this book. Can you explain, Seth, what you mean by enrollment? And I think you're right, that thought you said earlier, I probably picked it up from you but I've been operating on that assumption, whether someone is paid or volunteer, we're all volunteers. I mean, everybody today has great options. Maybe our grandparents were like, well, my father was a farmer, my mother was a seamstress. So, therefore, I will be a farmer, I will be a seamstress. and you know, you only see around the village. I don't know how to blacksmith, so I guess I'm doing this, right? And now I think that's one of the paralysis of young leaders in their 20s is, you know I went to law school. I thought about three careers that I could possibly do. That was as big as my 1970s imagination was, and so I went to law school in the 80s and 90s and, you know it was good, it was fine. But now if I was 20 I'm like, I could be anything and that's how I was raised.

[01:10:03.000]

You know, you are really leading volunteers, and yet some people still phone in their work. So what is enrollment and how is that going to transform how we lead?

[01:10:14.900]

**Seth Godin:** So there's the traditional understanding which is you had to send your kids to school, so they had to go, or you decide to go to law school. You enrolled. I lived in the law school dorm at NYU for a year. What an unhappy place that is, because after the first week of "I got in" wears off, people are like, oh now I have to do this for the rest of my life. And there was this, this horrible Chasm between the brains and hard work, and the joy in the practice. So, enrollment says, I want to go where you're going.

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It says that you're leading a trip to Ottawa. Ottawa is where I want to go. How can I support that? Enrollment is this desire to put in the effort to, as a community, get to where we said we want to go. And it's cheating to work with people who are enrolled. It's so much easier, right? So the magic of The Carbon Almanac was, we are all volunteers, including me. And if you want to leave, thanks for being here. But everyone is here. I didn't spend one minute persuading people that this was a good idea. If you don't think it's a good idea, don't come.

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And once you have enrollment, once there's a culture, what things are like around here, now, you've created something spectacular. So the hard work of being a leader is to create the conditions for enrollment, and then establish the standards and get out of the way, because all of us are smarter than any of us. And if you just need cogs, go to Upwork and hire some people somewhere else for \$3 an hour, but if you need people who will solve interesting problems, which is the only problems that are left, you're gonna need enrollment.

[01:12:12.400]

**Carey Nieuwhof:** So I can imagine there are some leaders listening who would love to have a fully enrolled team, and what they have right now is they've got, let's say a team of 10. They've got three that are super enrolled, maybe there's one or two on the bubble, it's like, I don't know if they're going to be here in six months, and then there's the broad middle people who show up, they do their work but to use the phrase, their hearts aren't in it. They're not they're not fully given to the mission, to the cause. What advice do you have for leaders who are facing that situation? Because I don't think that's very unique. I think that's pretty common.

[01:12:48.900]

**Seth Godin:** So it's very, very common and the main reason is the indoctrination of 12 to 20 years of schooling. Will this be on the test? Don't raise your hand too high, don't push too hard. Wait to get picked. Do your job. Then go out and get a six-pack because there'll be more work tomorrow. And if people show up on that kind of defense and you just say on the first day, this place is different. They will not believe you. They will not believe you on the fifth day or even the 20th day. Because they're watching you, not listening to you. And they are starting to figure out whether they're going to find what they seek in meaning from this or not.

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So in Linchpin, I wrote about a coffee shop, a high-end coffee shop in New York City called Dean and DeLuca. And there was somebody who worked there who was cognitively a little disabled. And he was in charge of making sure the place was clean. And if you went there, he greeted you. He made sure that the place was spotless. He made sure, even though he didn't have to that when you were done, he was going to take your stuff away. He was the mayor of Dean and DeLuca. And I'm embarrassed that I can't remember his name, but it was fifteen years ago, and I talked to him for awhile, and he said this was the best job he ever had, and that he knew he didn't have to do those things. He wanted to do those things because those things made him feel honestly and accurately like he was making a difference in the

lives of the people who are coming there. So if you say to the people who are working for you you're just cogs. These are the standards. I'm going to lock you in your office, bring it back to me when you're done, a few people will rise to that but most people want more than that if they're going to bring a different thing to work. So where are the interesting problems you're asking them to solve? There are kindergarten teachers who feel a sense of meaning. And they're also kindergarten teachers who feel oppressed by the curriculum, by the way, they're being measured to the test, even though the kids are only five. So, as the leader, you first have to decide, do I need those people in the middle to be enrolled? Do I need them to have a significant job or do I just want cogs? Because if you need them to do that, you need to take a whole bunch of risks about giving up control. You need to sit with people and say these are the problems right here. How are we going to solve them together? And when they have a suggestion, even if it's not your idea, the answer is sure, let's try that. Because that is what many people seek in their lives to accomplish more than they thought, they could be treated with respect to do work. That matters. And it doesn't matter whether you have a beer store, or spiritual institution. People can find those things.

[01:15:51.200]

**Carey Nieuwhof:** So I'm on a lifelong mission to stop making excuses and letting them define me and that has been a journey, Seth, and I'm on it. But there's a line that jumped out and absolutely loved it. You said, "you're not under the circumstances, you are the circumstances," so I love that. What are the implications of that?

[01:16:13.400]

**Seth Godin:** Well if you're a leader, you are even if you're just a contributor, the culture is being contributed to, by you. It's not controlled by you, but you're doing something for the culture. If any organization like yours has ever produced more magic than your organization. Well then, you can't blame the wind, you gotta blame the Captain of the boat. You gotta blame the person who made the sails because the wind is the same for both of you. And we are seeing in any field that you want to name, some folks showing up and making a ruckus and making a difference with exactly the same tools you have. So under the circumstances, the economy isn't as go-go as it was in 1987 or whatever it was, okay fine. Now what do you do with it? Now that we have this thing going on, what are you going to do with it? Because whining is easy. But whining is not productive.

[01:17:11.200]



**Carey Nieuwhof:** Yeah, that's that's a good challenge. Let's talk about Page 19. That's a principle and a concept that you're debuting. Can you explain what you mean by Page 19?

[01:17:23.900]

**Seth Godin:** So the first couple weeks of the almanac were thrilling, but a little scary because we owed penguin, 97,000 word, multi-hundred page Illustrated design, footnoted Almanac in 165 days, and we knew there was going to be a page 19, but we also knew there wasn't one person on the team who could do all the tasks necessary to finish page 19. So what are we going to do about that?

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So I started talking relentlessly about page 19 thinking, which is, the way we do things around here is you write a paragraph and you hand it to someone and say, please make this better. You make a chart, and you hand it to someone and say, please make this better. And then you look at a paragraph in a chart that someone else put together, and you make it better. And if we made that cycle happen 20 times in a row page, 19 would be done and we just did it over and over and over and over again. Once you buy into page 19 thinking, you don't ship junk, but you do take one step closer, that the yellow brick road has left-hand turns and right-hand turns, but eventually it gets you to Oz, but you don't take two steps to say I'm not there, I give up. You then take a third step. You figure out how to get your steps back on track?

[01:18:41.200]

**Carey Nieuwhof:** If we can pull the lens back a little bit as I want to ask a few more questions, Seth. One of them, I heard you, and again, I didn't get through the entire episode because I literally discovered it on the way to recording this podcast. But your conversation with Tim Ferriss, you talked about writing The Carbon Almanac, and how when you sat with the data, either before you started writing or when you were working on it and thought about the future of the planet what we've done to it, it led you to a very dark space. And we are dealing with a lot of leaders who, for a whole variety of reasons, deal with very dark spaces on an ongoing basis. Something internal, external, life, chemical, whatever. What did you do with that dark space and how do you move yourself through it when you hit one?

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**Seth Godin:** I am completely unqualified to talk about actual cognitive and emotional problems. So I'm not going to do that.

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But what I will tell you is there were dozens of us in exactly the same state a few weeks into the almanac. But if you ask people, the hundreds of us, as we were handing it in how we felt, everyone was thrilled, empowered, and optimistic about what might happen next. And the difference that happened in that short window was simple, which is, helplessness is a dark place to be. Taking action in community is really useful. And if we go all the way back to Norman Cousins, *An anatomy of an Illness*, what we find is that patients who feel like they have some sort of agency, live a better life and live a longer life than people who feel like they're just a victim. And for hundreds of us, we didn't feel like a victim because we were doing this important thing, and there was a period after we were done where we like, now what do we do? But what we found is that we could then take it one city at a time. One issue at a time. How do you ban gas powered leaf blowers in Aurelia? You, how many people would it take to get the Town Council to pass that law? 20? Not many more. That's incredible that we can make that kind of impact with just 19 other people and the work of doing it fills us with possibility and optimism.

One of the problems with people who help in a palliative way folks who are in a dark place is it can add up for you. It can make it hard for you to persist. And the first thing I would say to you is, thank you for doing that thankless work. And the second thing I would say is, everyone once in a while it pays to shift gears and do a different kind of work where you can see the results today. And that's one reason why I cook dinner every night. Because cooking dinner is a project that only takes forty-five minutes, and then I'm successful. I'm done. And balancing those things, I think, is really important. You know, as we start to wrap this up, one of the things that I say is, you can't be completely significant all the time. But if you can find the smallest useful unit of significance, for the smallest possible audience, you will find what you were looking for and then you can do it again.

[01:22:22.800]

**Carey Nieuwhof:** Another concept we touched on I think, maybe our last interview, that I thought about a lot was “changing the channels.” And you have incredible stories that I haven't heard elsewhere, you shared a few of those on the podcast today. And I think changing, you know, the whole doom-scrolling thing and just the 24/7 news feed which is actually designed to depress you, because good news doesn't sell. How have you changed the channels in your life and are there any channels you would recommend that we start tuning into? Any voices that you're like, oh please pay attention to this?

[01:23:06.000]

**Seth Godin:** I'm going to give an unsolicited endorsement to going three times to a qualified Cognitive Behavioral Therapist. At the first meeting, say I'm only coming three times. I don't want to talk about my childhood. I just want you to give me tools to break habits.

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I met somebody the other day had a bracelet, blue bracelet, on his wrist. I said, what's that? He said, every time I complain I have to move it to the other wrist. How simple is that? And he said, within two days, the number of complaints I had went down 80% cause it's such a pain in the neck to keep moving this bracelet from one wrist to the other.

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That when we come back, what we set our eyes on, what we focus on, becomes our reality. There are people outside of Borelli, India who don't have any electricity and never have, and who worry about losing a family member to something like malaria. That's not a problem for you or for me. Our problems are right here in front of us. We don't notice those because no one is pushing them on us. So if the problems you are pushing on yourself are getting you into a funk and you're not solving the problems, then what good are they? Just don't look at those problems. Look at a different set of things that you can actually do something about., There's a difference between a problem and a situation. Situations cannot be changed, problems can. Pick your problems, pick your future, pick the narration you want to have. And if there's a company that is making a profit by making you feel bad, you need to figure out how to change your inputs, so that company has no sway over you.

**Carey Nieuwhof:** Wow. Is there a question that you don't think anyone is asking? Or you don't hear people asking that you think everybody should be asking?

**Seth Godin:** Well, I gotta tell you, in this era of logorrhea where anyone who wants to talk and talk as all as long as they want because we all have a microphone. I don't feel under-heard. I will say that I do think other people aren't having the conversations they need to have. And that's why you write a book, because a book is a signal and a totem that says, this is something we should talk about. And none of this is going to get better if we don't talk about it. So I don't need people to ask me questions. I need people to ask each other questions.

[01:25:48.200]

**Carey Nieuwhof:** Logorrhea. That's fantastic. Logos, by the way, is a Greek word for word/speech, so that's good. Well, the book is called Song of Significance. It's out

probably by the time you hear this podcast, and if not available for pre-order and we will share it with you. Is there any special places you'll find it, Seth? And I know you're still on Instagram, not on Twitter anymore, but available on your blog as usual. So just tell us where we can find it and you.

[01:26:20.100]

**Seth Godin:** seths.blog is a good place to start. I built a page seths.blog/song where I'm posting videos and other stuff about the book. So you can go check that out if you want.

[01:26:31.600]

**Carey Nieuwhof:** Awesome. Seth, I can't thank you enough. This has felt really, really personal and meaningful to me. And I just want to thank you for everything you do. And thank you for your generosity of time and spirit today, as well, it's been a joy.

[01:26:48.300]

**Seth Godin:** Thank you, Carey. This is, I think, our best podcast ever.

[01:26:53.400]

**Carey Nieuwhof:** Agreed. Thank you.

Well, I hope you enjoyed that as much as I did. That was a delightful conversation. And you know, Seth, he just has so many phrases, that's why I started there, that kinda live in my head in the best possible way that something can live in your head and really make me think and help me point my compass straight, on my good days but also my days where things are not going quite as well.

We will link to absolutely everything in the show notes. You can go to [careynieuwhof.com/episode576](https://careynieuwhof.com/episode576) for that and if you enjoyed this, even though he's not on social media, gives out the shout-out, I mean his team is, or somebody is. And make sure that you share it with a friend. And if you did enjoy it, please leave a rating and review. We would love that. Wherever you're listening to podcasts, when you spread the word, we get to do this again and again, hey, permission to do this again, tomorrow, right? We talked about that, didn't we? Anyway, today's episode is brought to you by The Art of Leadership Academy this month, June 21<sup>st</sup>, I'm doing a coaching call on how to grow your attendance through deeper engagement at your church. If you want to join the live coaching, sign up now at [theartofleadershipacademy.com](https://theartofleadershipacademy.com).

And check out Leadr, that's leadr.com, to learn how you can create a culture of recognition that will engage and retain your team. Use a promo code CAREY and you'll get 20% off your first year with Leadr.

[01:28:10.900]

Well, I got to tell you, I once in a while, sit down with some very, very good friends and next episode, no exception. I sit down with Frank Bealer. He's been on before. Frank and I have become best friends. And, well, we talk about friendship, and my goodness, I thought okay, we'll spend 15 minutes talking about this, uh, most of the episode. It's crazy. Plus multi-use facilities and a lot more. Here's an excerpt.

[01:28:34.500]

**Frank Bealer:** High-performers are often times pretty controlling with their life and their organization, and what they do. And so, what bigger dopamine hit is there something that you're controlling is performing well? So therefore you want to control more of it. And so, that becomes your life-giving thing. And once again, we've got pastors and leaders on here. I know they're giving credit to God and Jesus along the way. I'm not trying to knock that. I'm just saying, but you're talking about a dopamine hit. Gosh if things are performing well, I wanna make another phone call.

[01:29:04.700]

**Carey Nieuwhof:** That's coming up next time on the podcast. I think it's really going to help. I'm very concerned about loneliness in leadership. And so many leaders feel isolated. So Frank and I talked about that and genuine friendship. I've also, we are minutes away from my integrity series, and this is something I am very concerned about. Just the lack of integrity in leaders and particularly in church leadership. So we're gonna go at it with Dr. Henry Cloud, Katelyn Beatty, Eric Peterson, that's Eugene's son, and Chuck Degroate on narcissism. I think I'm adding episodes on Tim Keller who recently passed away, talking to his biographer and then got some other special stuff. My goodness, I am very excited for this. That's going to get you through part of the summer, then also coming up on the podcast. We have got Jon Gordon, Kenny Jang, Paula Faris John Acuf.

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Who else have we lined up? Kevin Kelley. So excited for that. Judah Smith, Dave Ramsey, Miroslav Volf. Yeah, we're all over the place because that's how I like to do things around here. And hey, as we head out, would you like to get on, every Friday on a weekly basis, my email newsletter, it's called On The Rise. And that's where I feature some really fascinating curious and sometimes offbeat and sometimes right

on point stuff about faith, culture, the future church, and other topics I find really, really helpful. To start receiving it, just go to [ontherisenewsletter.com](http://ontherisenewsletter.com). You can sign up for free, and of course you can unsubscribe at any point, but that's [ontherisenewsletter.com](http://ontherisenewsletter.com), it's my most opened email every single week.

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I get tons of feedback on it. Would love to have you join the over 85,000 leaders who get that every single Friday. Go to [ontherisenewsletter.com](http://ontherisenewsletter.com), you can check it out. Thank you so much for listening. Thanks for being generous. Thanks for being people who care.

[01:30:55.500]

And thanks for allowing us to be in your corner. That's what I do every day, I get up, try to be in your corner, and I hope that today's conversation has helped you identify and break a barrier you're facing.