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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 and I hope our time together today helps you thrive in life and leadership. Today, you and I sit down with Jon Acuff and we are going to talk about the difference between high performers and high achievers, how to make a goal and guarantee a goal, and the problem of false humility in the church. Again, this is one of those things where Jon and I have been on multiple rounds, we just sit down and have a great conversation and this is the kind of stuff we talked about at lunch, and then the green room, and over dinner, and if you were to have a conversation with Jon, it would probably go along these lines. And I hope you really enjoy it and share it with your friends. Today's episode is brought to you by my free guide on four steps to engage your church around generosity. Could you imagine having a generous church that actually gave meaningfully to the mission? I can help.

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All you need to do is go to engagegenerosity.com to pick up my free guide on how to grow generosity in your church. And then, today's episode is brought to you by BELAY. If you are ready to do more, and spend time on the things that actually matter, text my name, CAREY, to 55123 to get their latest eBook, The Power of Productivity, that's courtesy of BELAY.

Well, Jon Acuff is a multiple New York Times bestselling author and he has written nine books. We talk about the writing process, they include soundtracks, your new playlist, the number one Wall Street Journal bestseller, Finished: give yourself the gift of done, and his latest which we'll touch on, All It Takes is a Goal. When he's not writing or recording his podcast. All it takes is a goal. Jon can be found on stage. He's one of INCs top 100 leadership speakers. And my goodness, we opened the conversation on this. He works so hard on his craft. He's spoken to hundreds of thousands of people at conferences colleges and companies around the world, including FedEx, Range Rover, Microsoft, Nokia, and Comedy Central. Those are like fun places to talk, aren't they?

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So Jon's back and listen, if you're brand new to the podcast, welcome. We're really delighted that you're here. We want to bring the best of the business world to church leaders and the best of the church world to business leaders. And Jon, like a

lot of our guests, straddles both. So welcome. We're glad you're here. Now, would you love your church to be more generous? My goodness. I'll tell you, broke thinking and scarcity mindset in the church drives me crazy. When I was starting out in ministry, we transitioned from three historic buildings dating back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, three churches that were stuck, like stuck for decades. And you know what our budget was, adding all three churches together?

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Thirty thousand dollars. That was it. So fast forward a few years were raising money and this guy comes along and we're building our first building together brand new building multi-million dollar facility. He says, I want to give you thirty thousand dollars as a donation. I'm like, great, as long as you put in a stained glass window in memory of my mother, and I'm like, ah, money with strings attached. You know what I said?

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Thank you, but no. We were trying to ditch the organs. Well, we had decided that already and something just didn't sit right with me. So that's one of the decisions I made along the way, we are not accepting donations with strings attached. Now, you get, you know, challenges like that all the time, people who don't want to give people want to give to designated funds. People who don't want to tithe, you're afraid to talk about money, all that stuff. So if you want some help,

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I'd love to help, I've got a free guide, It's called for steps to engage your church around money and generosity. And I will open up my toolkit to help you. So you can click the link in the description to this episode or go to engagegenerosity.com to get free and instant access to my guide for steps to engage your church around money and generosity. And then I love Belay, they do a great job and I've turned to them so many times over the years for staffing, help, you know, you have that sudden vacancy in your, like, I need someone here tomorrow. Well, they might not be able to do tomorrow, but they can often do next week or this month and they will sort through, well, thousands of resumes. They get like a forget what the number is, but something like, 4,000 people apply to work with Belay every month, and they narrow the field, narrow the field until they have the recommended candidate for you.

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This can work for you. No matter how many staff your church has or how big the budget is There's only so much you can get done in a day for most of us time is your most valuable resource my very first hire in leadership was an assistant and Belay knows productivity.

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They work with EAs. They work with VAs.

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They work with Accountants and a whole lot more and they've got a free book for you. Maybe you're not sure but if you want to see what you can get done go check out The Power of Productivity It's free and Just text my name CAREY to 55123 and start reclaiming your time today. And now my conversation with Jon Acuff

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Jon, welcome back.

JON ACUFF: Thanks for having me again. I'm looking forward to it.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: So when your name comes up, and it often comes up in the best way, I always tell leaders like, and in this is sincere, and I think I may have mentioned this to you. No one I know seems to work harder at their craft than you do when it comes to writing and public speaking. I would love to start by diving into your disciplines, your current disciplines, when it comes to writing, speaking, and preparing to give a talk.

JON ACUFF: Yeah. So it's an interesting question because I'm in the midst of, I've got a four-hour "what I'm doing" in a couple weeks for a client of ours.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: A 4 hour talk?

JON ACUFF: A 45-minute keynote, 3 hours of me taking the entire team through like a breakout, so it's an expansion of Soundtracks, this book, I wrote about mindset. Yeah, so in a situation like that, I start to gather the ideas, I start to gather them and go, okay, what do I want to accomplish in this? What do I, where do I want the audience to be going as we talk about this, which, you know, where does there need an activity? Where does there need humor? Where do I need to? I think about a speech, like an accordion, like, you can constrict it and expand it and so I'll go okay, where does this need more space? Like, this is there was to, it was too long between jokes here, that was a drought. Like I brought them through a desert. I don't need a desert. Okay, I need some humor in here. I need some story in here. I need some application here. Whoa, I did too much here and I know they're going to feel overwhelmed if I give them, here's 10, easy things to do, like, nobody sitting there

wants 10 easy things, you know. And so like, where do I need to dial it down? Where is my enthusiasm adding too much content? I would say, you know, x amount of years and that's where I'm leaning into letting a speech breathe.

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It takes courage to let a speech breathe. I think a lot of times young speakers, new speakers, overfill it because they're afraid they won't have enough value. And so I'm learning now to go, here's an idea. Let's talk around this one idea. Let me let you and the audience think about it and give you space. And so that's kind of how, from a speech perspective, that's how I start. But the big thing I'm doing now is putting a priority on thinking. Like I'm really deliberate about thinking. I read this book, *The Road Less Stupid*, by this guy, Keith Cunningham.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: I'm reading it right now. Was it you who, somebody, you told me to read it.

JON ACUFF: Yeah.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: You told me to read it. Thank you, Jon.

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JON ACUFF: So like that idea that we don't put a value on thinking. And then I'm listening to all this old school stuff like Earl Nightingale and all the, kind of the classics that I never listened to from like the forties.

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And they have these audio collections that are like 15-16 hours on Audible and a lot of it's about thinking and I realized I'm moving so quickly I barely give myself time to think. So in the month of June, I said a thinking goal and in like it's August when we're recording this, I have a thinking goal and I'm writing down. Like, every hour that I that I put toward thinking, I write it down. I've got it in my notebook right here. I'll show you the visual for people watching on YouTube, but you can see like, that's my thinking hours like so, I know that I'm putting time against it and my ideas get better and it also takes humility to think because it means I don't know the answer, and so, and I need to stop and think about it.

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Yeah. So thinking has changed my life.

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The idea like, so I'll come up with a topic and then go, okay, if you know, here's an example, I wanted to do an exercise of why don't people finish goals. Like some people ask me that all the time and I really hadn't spent a thinking our on it or two hours on it. So I wrote that down, I came up with probably 30 on my own and then I put it on my Facebook page and then I started gather them. So now what I'll do next is I'll start to categorize them. I'll come up with 80 ideas and then I'll shrink them down to five. People can't hold 80 in their head right there. Do I see, you know consistency. So yeah, that's kind of part of my process is it takes a lot of time.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: Yeah. Are you following his method for thinking time which I'm going to paraphrase, you've studied him. I'm reading him. The book turned up on my Kindle. So basically I read it on airplanes. Yeah. When we're taking off or landing right you can't really work online.

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So anyway, I think it involves sitting in a big chair with a legal pad, like a yellow, old-fashioned legal pad with a pen, and basically all distractions off, your phone's not in the room, and you just give yourself one or two questions to think about for an hour. Is that about right?

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Is that what he's saying?

JON ACUFF: So for me, that's about right. I mean, the only change I'd have to that is I've started to ideas in a different way, where if I have an idea while I'm working out, or if I have an idea where I'm out and about with family or friends, I have a Google Doc that says these ideas are awesome, and I titled it that because I want that positive reinforcement. So it's not, you know, ideas to think about. These ideas are awesome. And then I just create a running list, and then periodically I move them to the right category. So I go, oh, that was a reel, that was a book idea,, this is a question I have for Carey. So I have 10 or 12 other documents that they'll go live into.

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I got this sense that the only time, I the only way I'm able to write what I hope are good books or give good speeches is, if I spend lavish amounts of time on my creativity. Like I said to somebody the other day, you can tell when an author has written a book with their hands, but not their heart.

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Like you can just feel like, oh they they weren't in this, like their heart wasn't in it, it was a great topic and they got paid to write about the topic, whatever. But like and it's technically true but you go but it's they're not in it.

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And they wrote it with their hands, not their heart. And so for me, in order to write something with my heart, I have to treat ideas like diamonds versus like rubble and so I have to spend the time and go, here's an idea, and so of the as I'm listening to audiobooks as I'm doing all this I'm trying to treat the ideas like they're worth something and then get them in the right place to not be an idea hoarder. There's a lot of leaders that are idea hoarders. They have a million, like, an idea in this notebook is worth zero. In this in this setting. It's worth zero when I get it out of the notebook when I start to shape it when I start to share it. Now it starts to have a lot of value. I had fun collecting it's great, but until I share it until I do something with it, it doesn't have its full value.

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So I'm really a geek about ideas and about thinking,

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Of course, you'd put it in a notebook, that makes sense because you've been like, mr. Notebook for years and years and years and I find that more excited. I have an obviously executed on this, but what I have executed and I want to ask you this next question.

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It occurred to me, you know, I've got a pre-digital memory.

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I remember when you used to stare at the ceiling tiles or like at the clock to watch the second-hand turn because you were so bored because there's nothing to do. Like I remember that. Anybody under 30 doesn't remember that. But if you're over 30, you remember a bit of that. And I remember a lot of that.

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I was getting really concerned earlier the summer of 2023 that my attention span was shot. And I found that, like I started reading on my month and I was finding it hard to like stay focused for two or three pages. So then I picked up Tom Holland's

Dominion which I started about a week ago. It is thick, man. It's like one paragraph a page and it goes on. There's no pictures. Oh, there are pictures in the middle. But you know, like it is a tome. And now I can do a half hour, no problem. Did you have to retrain your mind to sit still for that thinking time or was that process easy for you? What are you doing some hacks/tricks?

JON ACUFF: Yeah I mean I'm constantly training it, so it wasn't I retrained it and then I got it back but I am paying attention to like okay, I can scroll Instagram, reels and die without devour those. And I look up and it's been 40 minutes and so part of, you know, when I think about the things I do to stay focused, want to give myself a ton of grace. So I'm not going to beat myself up for getting distracted, the odds are stacked against you. I say this to people all the time. There's 30,000 of the world's best developers working to get your time. So like the odds are stacked like you should never go so weird Instagram's so sticky. No, it's not weird. They have phds on staff, who go, how do we make Canadians who are redheaded in the Toronto greater area spend more time on this thing? Like, the odds are against you. So I do things to what I would call even the odds are stacked, the odds in, you know, in my favor. I don't bring my phone into my bedroom at night.

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Charge it to my office because I know I'm gonna, I don't bring it, I don't bring my phone to transition moments. So a transition moment for me is I go run had a great workout and then I turn on the shower and I stand there in the bathroom, looking at my phone. And next thing I know the waters been running for 11 minutes and I don't know where the time went.

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So I have a hard time making transitions. I leave the phone in other places but then there's things like I read with a pen. So, if I'm reading a physical book, I have a pen. And if I need to stop because I got distracted. To buy something. I draw a little circle in the margin where I stopped and I go, okay, wait a second, what's going on? And then I pick back up so I don't go. Oh, I couldn't finish this whole page.

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Like I'm giving myself little ways to move forward and go, I move the page forward.

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You know, and so I think little things like that help me. And then the more time I spend reading, the more time I spend listening, the easier it gets. So I listen to, you

know, when I'm working out, I listen to probably 15 minutes of a sermon and 45 minutes of an audio book that's positive and motivational. And I'll listen to that same audio book four or five times if it's a good one. And so I'm constantly feeding myself that. I always tell people I'm a naturally negative, pessimistic person, like cynical. I grew up in Massachusetts, maybe it's because I'm from Boston, I don't know. But I don't start positive. I've just tested positivity and I've tested negativity and the ROI of positivity is so much better.

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So I don't starve my doubts and my fears. I drown them like I drown them in other things. So when somebody tells me I'm really distracted, it's hard for me to focus or I'm really negative, I kind of look at it like, if you didn't eat all day at the end of the day, you were like, oh man, I'm so hungry, I know why. I know why. I feel like you didn't eat. And it's the same thing with positivity or focus or effort, I'm really trying to practice them. And then I feel like time is the only honest metric, you can say all you want, but until you're putting time against something, it's just fantasy.

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So if I want to write more books, I have to throw time at it. If I want better, stronger ideas, better speeches, better ways to help people. I have to throw time at it and often time alone time that's focused time, that's deliberate. And so I look at it like that but when you find something you love doing like the thing for me no one wakes up and goes. I want to be disciplined today. I'm today I'm going to have grit today. I'm going to have persistence, that's not how life works at all. What happens is you bump into something you kind of sort of like, and you want to give it a little more time. And so for me, when I started blogging in my mid-30s, I liked it and I thought, oh man, I like this. So I didn't say to myself one day, I need to start getting up earlier and watching this television. No, I found something I loved and then I looked at time like a log and I wanted to throw it into the fire, make the fire even bigger. So I always challenge people like, find something you love so much that Netflix becomes boring.

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Like what? That's the goal. Like Netflix, like I still will watch TV. It's not like I'm against TV, but like when you've got something you care about, other stuff loses its shine. It's not that I became so deliberate. I don't scroll as much now or whatever. It's just that I thought, man, if I write more, I get to write more books. And that's the greatest thing in the world. Like, wow. And so then I just started throwing hours at it. That changed my life.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: I want to go back to the quality of ideas too, because I think thinking time can really help with that. Like sitting there for 30, 60 minutes with just a pen and paper, no distractions, working on ideas. One of the things, you get a lot of books sent to you as I do, one of the things that's really alarming me, either I'm becoming more critical in my eye or the trend is happening, but I find a lot of stuff gets published that feels very superficial.

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In other words, somebody thought about this for 20 minutes turned it into a book or as a friend of mine says, could have been a blog post, right? Like but it's not a book and as you and I have talked about before on this podcast.

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The more books, you write, it doesn't, it gets easier in some respects but harder in the other because you've used so many stories and so many ideas, right?

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And I think Neeray Allen and Cal Newport both would say the ability to focus is a superpower. Like, if you want to stand out, particularly in the age of AI, your ability to focus and create deep thought, meaningful thought, singular focus, following through, that is the superpower because everybody else is distracted and in the shallows.

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Has your thinking time or any new disciplines you have, helped you focus? Because I really I want to focus on focus, I guess is what I'm saying.

JON ACUFF: Yeah, right, a hundred percent. And the other thing I'd say is that use it in the way that helps you the most. So, I have a big whiteboard in my office. I'll walk up and down and throw Post-it notes. Like, today, I have four different colored Post-it notes because I had four buckets of ideas I was working on. So, don't chain yourself to this kind of rigid idea that you have to sit still for 45-minutes and it has to be this, like if that helps you go for it, but if you're a, you know, person that needs to move around like I need to move around, do it that way. Like, I really don't care about the means. I care about what gets done.

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So, if you go for a run and come back with three amazing ideas, awesome. If somebody else goes, I sat my spot, I wrote, awesome.

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But again, I think with a book, it's really the challenge is when the idea hasn't been tested with real people, that's where it falls apart.

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So when a book has been written in isolation, I think real people immediately go, but what about, what about, what about, what about? So I just wrote this new book, All It Takes Is A Goal, and there's 40 real stories in it. From 40 real people that aren't me. So if I had written that book in isolation and didn't take the time to talk through the ideas, to work through the ideas, to, you know, what ends up happening, Carey, is like, here's an example. You're in the book. Like, I don't know if you saw this part in the book.

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You're in the book because I talk about you, flying your parents to back to see the Tulip Festival.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: I did read that, that was really cool.

JON ACUFF: That has texture because that's real, and it was better than me, coming up with. Here's a list of some stuff people could do, which feels generic. There's like, it takes time for an idea to not feel like stock photography, some books feel like stock photography, because somebody said, this is an idea, let me write about it. But it doesn't have real. Honest to it. It doesn't have texture to it. So even me using you as a one-sentence example, goes somebody really did this and there was a real joy and life wrapped around that, and when I put that in a book, it's different than if I said, or if you want to maybe go to Italy because you love pasta, that's a generic idea, but falls apart immediately, where the idea of you flying your parents back, you know, to see the tulip festival, like that has a texture to it because it's real. And I think that's true of great comedy. I think that's true of great sermons. I think that's true of anything you create when there's a level of realness to it. And the problem is real takes time.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: Yes, 40 stories is way harder than sitting there using chat GPT to generate 40 ideas.

JON ACUFF: Oh yeah, 100%.

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And so like it just takes time and it takes the willingness to put the idea down and then change the idea and go this wasn't any good. And and again, like I think you just have to be willing to spend the time doing it. And my thing is, I know that before I start writing, I'm afraid that the ideas won't show up, but every time I eventually write, the ideas show up.

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And they're ideas that I wasn't expecting to show up, but I gotta be there to capture them. But before I start, I'm terrified that I'm all out, I don't have any, so I have to sit down and do the work of doing it. And then the other thing I'd say about focus, Carey, is you have to have a goal you're working toward. Like, again, nobody focuses just because focus. I focus because if I focus, I get to write a lot of books. My wife called me out on this. She was, one thing that changed me in my writing was I got stuck between books. I got stuck between Finish and Soundtracks. So I took too much time. I got afraid. And then like the months stacked up and I got afraid of writing. If you don't do a difficult thing, every day you don't do it, it gets more difficult.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: I'm in that space right now. Next question.

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No, no, exactly, right?

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But it's been two years since my last book release.

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JON ACUFF: You gotta jump in, you gotta jump in. Like you're adding days, dude. You're adding days to the wall. The wall gets harder to climb every time you add another day to it, it's only getting higher. And so I got stuck on my wife very lovingly because I love that about Toni. We are talking about your wife that she'll say true things to you. She said, you know, if you keep writing books every three or four years you'll get to write like 5 more, I was like, what are you talking about? She said

was like, let's just do the math. So how many contracts can you do? And how old are you now?

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And I was like, oh my, I don't want, I want to write way more than 4 or 5.

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And so I now had a reason to focus. Like I had a mission to focus versus going, I need to get better at focusing. So what I've seen is somebody who's got that and it doesn't have to be perfect. It doesn't have to be final. Like you have to know exactly where you're going but somebody who has that will push harder, will lean into it, will kind of give more of it because they have a reason. Like, take basketball.

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NBA players whose only reason was to get the money stop playing well when they get the money, so they get the big contract for 10 million. And if that was their only reason, there's no reason players who go? No, I'm here for excellence. I'm here for my legs. Like Kobe made a lot of money. Kobe didn't go. Okay, I've made the money. Like LeBron could have retired five years ago, like, he's made all the money. Like Tom Brady had made all the money but excellence was their goal, so they always had something to keep trying and getting better. And so for me if you can figure out some of that, then you'll learn to focus.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: Well and you know, a lot of people who listen to this podcast too, you and I were talking before he hit record like one of the reasons retirement isn't attractive to me at this stage, nor to you, is we love what we do. Like, hey there are days but I mean most days like this is pretty awesome, what we get to do. Another thing, I want to talk about experiments before we dive into goals. Another experiment, new thing for you, is you took 30 days off this past summer. So what did you learn on your summer vacation, Jon Acuff?

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JON ACUFF: Well, one, I learned I'm the source of most of the chaos in my company. So when I was absent from jumping on emails, there were less emails. When I was absent from starting fires, there were less fires. So that was, I learned that. I learned I'm less important than I think. It turns out the world did not fall apart with my 30 day absence. There's, you know, as a leader, you're like, oh man, I was hoping there'd be more storms, and maybe I'm just a person that has a company. I learned I

can do it. I learned that my creativity doesn't turn off, it just changes directions. So it wasn't that I stopped, being who I am. My counselor Chip Dodd, we talked about it before I went and he was like, you're not going to stop writing, you're just going to write different stuff because writing is healthy for you. So it wasn't that. I said I'm not going to write. It was that icon of allowed my creativity to go in different directions and go, I wonder what that would look like. I wonder what, you know.

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Some of it went to, okay, how do I make more of this going forward?

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So what I mean by that is if I thought for 100 hours in July, how do I bring that on? I Think that, you know, how do I have an on ramp. So I'll give you an example of what changed.

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So, the first week back, I got a book launch coming out and like four weeks, five weeks, stressful. Like, you know, those moments, you are running around like crazy. So, I've been gone for a month, I come back.

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And I feel this sense of, I'm supposed to leave margin. One of the other things I got from that month was that every new possibility starts with people, like every possibility, starts with people and I am an isolationist and I don't make time for people a lot of times. And so I need to make more time for people so it's the Tuesday. It's the second day I had been back and my daughter said, my oldest daughters had loved to play Pickleball with you before I go back to college. And so I say, cool. Let's play tomorrow at 8:00 a.m. on a Wednesday. I don't usually do that on an 8 a.m. at Wednesday. Like, I'm pretty full but I because I had left some thinking time. I just shifted and said that's pickleball time, and then I did it the next week and so finding ways to do to do that. To not so over schedule to not, you know, to allow room for new things to happen. That would be one of the. One of the other things I learned is that I need that time.

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And I need flexibility. That's the other thing. I struggle with like wanting to control everything. And I think there's a lot of leaders that feel the same way. Like my pastor, Kevin Queen, talks about being addicted to control or addicted to certainty.

And so learning to practice letting things happen versus they have to happen in my way, in my time. Like, I mean, that's been a lesson I'm continuing to learn.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: Was there a detox period or a withdrawal period?

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JON ACUFF: Yeah, seven days. I was like itchy. Like first seven days, I was like, and my wife said, cause she saw me packing, she was like, hey, it doesn't count as vacation if you read 42 leadership books while we're gone. That's not like, don't just try to secretly shift to a different form of work.

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So we've been married long enough that she can tell when like when I'm present and when I'm just working, add it when I essentially say to her well, I know. She knows, she's if she sees my laptop, she's gonna know I'm working. And so I'll just start to take a bunch of notes on my Kindle. She won't be able to, like a lot of it was I, you know, I'm going hiking, like I'm out hiking, a lot of it was, I cranked up how interruptible I was, when I'm at, you know, during a regular work week, I'm not as interruptible as I am during vacation. So when my wife Jenny there was one day. She was like we're in the mountains. She said hey I was just driving around. There's this massive rock in this neighborhood. It's like almost a monument like this is a huge rock. Let's go look at it. I was like, oh yeah, let's go look at the huge rock.

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So like little things like that you could be like, okay, let's let's go see what that's about. You know, versus I could schedule that rock for Tuesday at 8 a.m. if you're a very like, you know, like you just go in the moment. So so things and then here's the other thing, Carey. This is one of the things that kind of like a broken soundtrack for me, like just ended. I used to have this idea about money where if you built a company, if you became successful, you had less time and you are stressed all the time, and it was the cost of being successful. But the reason I got to take a month off was because I worked hard and I got successful in some areas of my life. I got to stop for a month because I had worked hard, not I became a slave to the work because I worked hard.

So I no longer believe the lie that to be successful means you have to get burned out, you have to work all the time, you have to have a terrible marriage, your kids don't know you. Like that's a very, I think, pervasive idea in leadership. And so now I just,

it's hard for me to believe that one because I saw the opposite. I got to slow down for a solid month because I had worked hard. So now I'm like, okay, where else can I work hard and also slow down? Like what if that leads to more slow down? That's even better.

[00:29:54.500]

CAREY NIEUWHOF: I think one of the things, I mean, I love tracking with you, Jon, and Jon and I usually schedule a phone call every month, just 30 minutes. I so look forward to it. We have one, we're talking now, but we got one next week. Which I'm very excited about. And you and I had a conversation about business model too, because I think you're getting at something that's really important. It's like, you know, everything I do is going to get bigger and better and it's shocking. When you come back after a month off, and like, you can catch up on email in a morning and there's not too many fires burning in your like, wow, that would have taken me a month and I'm now caught up in two hours. That's been generally my experience over the last few years when I've taken a month off, it's like that's insane. So you come back, but before you went away, we had talked about, you know, cutting back on. Some things that maybe weren't successful, because the other assumption is every year I have to do more, right? It's true of churches, true of businesses, you're doing more and we talked about it was an episode on this show. The Jon Lee Dumas episode that I'm like, give this a lesson is just a complete counterpoint.

[00:30:58.700]

JON ACUFF: You need to go listen to that episode. If you haven't listened to that episode, I love it.

[00:31:02.000]

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Yeah, it was a lot of fun because we talk shop and what was your takeaway from from Jon Lee Dumas when he was on this show?

JON ACUFF: My takeaway was that he had a really fun version of productive restraint.

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So by that, I mean, he was willing to say, hey these are the things I'm doing. This is how I want my life to be. This is good. Like I have a sense of enough might be different than another person sense of enough and that's what I took. So I look at him because I know he could probably double triple quadruple, whatever the thing he's doing and he's like no, this is this is the level like this is a healthy level for me.

So being willing to kind of figure that out to ask, that question, to explore that. Like I know a healthy level of speaking for me, I know a healthy level of writing for me, I know a healthy level, you know.

[00:31:53.200]

But because I enjoy it, I always tell people, you'll become a workaholic faster at something you love than at something you hate.

[00:32:00.800]

When you hate it, you try to do less. When you love it, there's no, like every opportunity, like, oh my gosh.

[00:32:07.600]

And so for me, that episode was really instructive because I think he was really practical about it and would say, hey, here's what I'm doing. And then the other thing, Carey, I think as leaders, if you don't review the stuff you're doing, if you don't look at the data, you never get to learn. And so you think everything's important. So, you know, I remember from a data perspective, my team was like, hey, we should use QR codes on your slides like when you speak. And I was like, nah, text-in is better. And they're like, just can we test it? I was really old-fashioned about it.

[00:32:42.900]

And we put a QR code on the slide and we put the text in and the cute and one the QR code outperformed, the text-in by 74 x, like 74 times.

[00:32:55.100]

So like it made me go. What else am I? You know? Like, where else is there stuff I'm doing. I haven't checked the numbers lately and you go oh that.

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Yeah, that doesn't that doesn't matter. That's actually it's not doing anything like it's really not and so I think as leaders that gives you the Courage to pull stuff back and go.

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Oh, you're right.

[00:33:15.400]

Like I had an assumption. I haven't checked my assumption in a year or two years like think of all the assumptions leaders, haven't checked since Covid.

[00:33:23.100]

Like we, I think you and I talked about this. I think part of the challenge is that people are getting burned out right now because they're working double jobs. So during covid, they had to pause their normal stuff and pivot and take on new stuff. Well, guess what's returned? The old stuff, but they didn't stop the new stuff they pivoted to they now have double jobs, double responsibilities, like, double amount of work, and they've never recognized that, they've never paused for a second. So my stuff like when I get practical, it allows me to be tactical and actually change something so, like, let's take goals for instance, a lot of people, I'll go, come up with a bunch of goals do come up with a big list and then I'll sit down. I'll go how many hours of free time? Do you have next week to execute these goals? Most people have no idea. I'll go, oh cool, let's just do a simple time-gap analysis.

[00:34:11.800]

How much time would these goals take? How much free time do you have? And usually people have a deficit before they've even started a new goal.

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Like you're - Yeah, you went through that exercise. I think we talked about it. I did that exercise multiple times.

[00:34:24.600]

And so for me, that's another one of those practical things as a leader.

[00:34:29.000]

Like what I'll tell leaders, like the reason you feel like you're out of time is you're out of time. Like I don't, like that's, it's not, it's not confusing.

[00:34:34.800]

Like that's the stuff that's frustrating about life is that I keep looking for a hack or a way to write books and it turns out the only way is to write like a lot and often. Like, and I want it to be different. I do, but I like, I'll turn in my 10th book here in a couple of weeks and it's a matter of me sitting down and working through the process and the time, you know, the ideas come. And I like, so I don't know that there's a shortcut to a lot of these things we want shortcuts to.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: And I don't know whether you want to talk about the specifics and if not, that's fine.

[00:35:06.900]

But I remember in that conversation, after you listen to the Jon Lee Dumas episode, you went back. You looked at your numbers on a particular initiative that you had started and have been doing for a few years. And you're like this is producing nothing except a lot of headaches and a lot of frustration be as specific or nonspecific as you want.

[00:35:25.700]

JON ACUFF: So I can tell you, you know what, I realized when I looked at the numbers and I'm talking gross revenue income expenses, all the numbers like P&L that. That about 80 to 85 percent of my expenses were generating 15% of my revenue. So I mean like that was shocking to me and I think what often happens.

[00:35:50.800]

Like the challenge and I'll just let's relate it to, my dad's a pastor, let's relate it to pastors for a second. I think their version is when they're good at writing sermons and so the sermon starts getting less and less and less, and less time as they do other things. Because so if they looked at their schedule and they're like, okay, the sermon is like, 40% of my responsibility. I might be the only one. You might be the only one who preaches, 40 times a year, whatever. Like okay, it's 50% of my responsibilities and I spend a lot. 11% of my week on it, like that's not just cuz you can do it. So for me, what happened was, I had these five or six different verticals in my business and one was just kind of moving along. And then like I looked up and the end it was carrying all the others so it was a healthy exercise for me to say if this was the only thing this business did, would it be a healthy business? Cool, by itself. If this other thing was the only thing it did, would it be a healthy business? Okay, cool. I don't want one thing to be really healthy that's covering up how unhealthy the other things are. And so when I looked at it, I was able to say, oh no, this is not. And I get people be like, oh, that's a loss leader, whatever. But when you've got a small business, I'm not in the business of loss leaders. Like people tell me that like, oh, don't worry about it's a loss leader.

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I'm like, there's like five of us. We don't have the room for like something to lose a lot of money.

[00:37:15.400]

Like that's not what I'm trying to do. And so, yeah, it was really eye-opening and it got me to change some things and to stop doing some things. And then the other thing that it made me do was, I made a list of things I do because they're important and things I do because they make me feel important. Those are two very different lists. Things I do that are important, things I do that make me feel important, it makes me feel important to say, oh yeah, I've got a big team, like to have a big team. What is it important? Do I need that? So I started to go through my business through my life, through kind of the way I was living and go, which of these things are for my ego and which are the things I'm supposed to be doing like which are the you know, things that are actually really moving the business forward and are healthy versus just things that make me feel good at a dinner party when I say them.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: I am so glad you said that because we're going through that in real time the summer we had a couple of staff departures and my instinct was to hire around them and then some of my team challenged me and said, nah, maybe we hire an agency. So if you look at our core team now it has shrunk in the last three years from 7 to 4. For and you know what? I think we're better for it early days but it's like, yeah, but it took me like it took me a month to Ah, my pride and I remember that we just flew in the the remaining team members to do a little retreat up at my place and we were sitting in this one booth at a restaurant, you know, almost like, you know, Mom and Dad and two kids kind of thing.

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And it was, but I'm like, you know, we're gonna be okay moving forward. And they're like, yeah, we're gonna be okay moving forward. So we're all, but you have to be able to swallow that pride because it's wonderful to say, you know, I got a team of 10 people or we've grown to this or we've grown to that. We actually grew. Oh, but like, oh my gosh.

[00:39:09.100]

JON ACUFF: No, my version was I'd be like, I would like to say like, oh yeah, follow my COO, he'll let you know. COO, like I have, like I have, like he's running the West division.

[00:39:19.100]

Like, come on, dude. The West division. You know what I mean?

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Also known as that corner of the basement.

[00:39:23.400]

JON ACUFF: Yeah, follow my COO. So stuff like that where I just started to hear myself. Like one of the things I talk about a lot is that self-awareness is a superpower. And I think self-awareness is the ability, part of it is the ability to overhear yourself.

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So I started to over here, myself and go, that didn't, what? Why did I say that? Like why did I mean, like I overhear myself on planes, like I noticed one day that I felt the need to tell people I had hit the New York Times. Best Sellers List on airplanes strangers. I'll never see them again, but when I tell them I'm an author. I know they go. Oh yeah, I wrote a book about dragons once or like oh yeah, like you must be like not successful. Authors are kind of like Hipsters that don't do anything and I feel this temptation to try to work that into a conversation, like why do I need this person's approval that badly and like, where am I not getting it and healthy ways and other parts of my life and like, so I think overhearing, yourself is a really interesting way to go. Is that the person I want to be and why, you know, what am I getting out of that? What am I getting out of that is powerful question.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: That's a great exercise.

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You know what? Because I didn't have language for it but I think I've caught myself over hearing myself saying things and I'm like ooh, that's like a little, that's not good man.

[00:40:46.900]

Like this is really who you want to be, like come on.

JON ACUFF: Well and everybody does it and so then it's so then what happens is I think you start to anticipate moments where you want to be ready. So I know for instance if I get invited to some Mastermind like it's our thing, I'm gonna feel insecure like I'm gonna like, I'm going to show up and somebody's got to mention

something, I'm going to feel like I got to say something big or whatever. So now I can be a little more prepared for that. I can go in and go I'm going to ask these three questions of the people I talked to their. Like I'm going to be curious about other people. I'm going to be I'm going to be, I know I'm going to be tempted to say this phrase. Like I know with the book launch, the same thing. I know I'm going to be tempted to assign my identity to the book launch. Like it's gonna happen. Like I know it's gonna happen. I've launched, this will be my ninth book. Like it happens. Like I'm gonna feel insecure. I'm gonna be grumpy the week before. So what am I doing against that?

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So, for me, it's about going, if I pay attention, and then here's the other thing, like I'm obsessed with wisdom.

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Like that's the big thing right now I'm working on. I'm obsessed with wisdom because I'm told it's worth everything, even though it costs you all that you have. So then I made a list. I was like, what does wisdom cost me? I'm told that in Proverbs 4. Wisdom is supreme. Get it, even though it costs you all that you have. So I was like, well, let's make a list of what it will cost me. It costs me my ego. Because to learn from somebody else, I have to sacrifice my ego. It costs me humility.

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It cost me time. It costs me money. It costs me awkwardness, so then you can go, where am I paying these things? And if I'm not paying time against wisdom, I don't get to be wise. Like that's just if I'm not putting hours against writing, not putting hours against thinking, not putting hours against making time for you and I to talk you and I could easily say we're too busy. We don't like but we both go, nah that's a wise half hour for me. It's helpful is encouraging its uplifting. I'm gonna pay that half. Our cost because I know there's wisdom there. So, for me, that's sent me down this path of okay, as a leader where are you paying for wisdom right now? And if you can't go, and if you go like I sometimes, listen to this on the treadmill at that like that's 11 minutes of wisdom, you'll be 11 minutes smart.

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And I think, as leaders, we hold our breath, we had a wisdom season, where we went to college, we went to Seminary, whatever, and then we think we have to hold our breath.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Or you think you have to be the fount of wisdom. It's like, we're did that come from?

JON ACUFF: Or you think somebody is going to give you time for it later? No one is going to make time for you to gain wisdom. You at like wisdom cost, you bravery wisdom cost, the leader going. I don't know right now, let me think about that. Let me work on an answer. Let me get back to you, versus, I'm going to spout this idea in this meeting because I don't want to look like I don't have an idea versus like the bravery of, I don't know yet, let me get back to you. Like that's a brave sentence for leaders to say.

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I'm like, dude if I spend 200 hours, 300 hours, 500 hours, whatever, seeking wisdom and really leaning into it, I know next year I'll be wiser. Like, it'll be impossible for me to not. Like, because I didn't spend 500 hours on it last year. And so that's the thing that I'm really passionate about. And I wanna be 60 and have 10 extra years of wisdom because I actually treated it like it was valuable, which at least in my faith perspective, I'm told over and over and over and over again, whatever you do, get wisdom. Whatever you do, whatever you do, whatever you do. My life wasn't lining up with that. So it's fun to say I was getting it, but my schedule didn't show that. Like, my attitudes, my behaviors, my actions didn't show that. So I hope five years from now, I've invested in wisdom and continue, and I'm reaping the benefit of that.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: You know, I wonder, I'm so glad you shared that. I wonder if there's another Temptation. Particularly, you know, you've written eight or nine books. I've written a few and we're seeing as quote experts and I walked out of my month off this summer and I didn't have a ton of lessons, but one of them was I want to be less of a teacher and more of a student, less of a teacher, more of a student. I want to have my mouth closed and my notebook open more often than I want to be the one speaking with, you know, people, taking notes if they do such a thing and I just think it's so easy to get fooled in to thinking, because so many people look to you for answers, to think, well, I always have to be the guy with the answers. No. How about I be a student and in very unlikely places, not just from well-known people or podcast guests, or famous people, or New York Times bestselling authors but like, you know, pastor of a local church, just sit down, have a coffee, connect chat, listen, be the student, not the teacher.

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That's what I'm thinking about.

JON ACUFF: Yeah for me you know for me I guess I look at it and say okay how do I pay attention to them enough versus just waiting for the next thing to say, you know, waiting for the next thing to kind of wow them. And the other thing is as far as like saying the answer because of our culture, like the reason celebrities, tell you their opinions on politics is because they got asked, and nobody likes to disappoint anybody. If you ask me, I'm going to say something versus saying, you know what? I really haven't done research on that so I'm gonna, you know, I'm going to bypass but like when somebody puts a camera in your face or a mic, you end up saying an answer so I've worked hard like if somebody says to me how do you find a children's book illustrator? I say I've never done that.

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I know there are some great resources. And I know these three illustrators have done that. These three authors have done that. You should go talk to them. Like they would be great at answering that question versus I want to serve the person. So I'm going to say a bunch of words. And for me, I'm trying to get better at that because I like the sound of my own voice and I'll ramble if I'm not careful. And Carey, if you said to me, what do you think are the three best parts of hang gliding? I would be like, well, you know what? I got to say number one is probably the view. The view is stunning. I've never hang-glided. The correct answer is, man, I've never gone hang gliding. That would be fun though.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: That's a good word. And you know what? Pastors in particular, but business leaders too. Everybody with a public profile is supposed to have an opinion now.

[00:47:11.200]

Yeah. Sometimes it's like I don't know. It's good answer.

JON ACUFF: Yeah. That's a full answer to. I don't know. Let me get back to you on that.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Or talk to her. Talk to him.

JON ACUFF: Yeah. Here's an expert on that. So if somebody said to me, okay, I really love to learn more about leadership on your podcast, Jon. I'd say, you know, Carey, my friend Carey Nieuwhof like he's led groups of people of different sizes for decades. You should check out his podcast. If somebody said, I want to grow my own

podcast, I'd say, have you heard of Jon Lee Dumas. I have a podcast. I can't help you grow yours, but Jon Lee Dumas man. He's got a system and he's like I think that's fun where you get to like point and there's something. So great of, when you don't try to think you have to do it all. Like my brother runs a non-profit. So when somebody asks me about nonprofits, I go, I mean you're gonna love my brother. Let me connect you with my brother. He's right in that zone, he's done that for 12 years. Like so, I think that's fun too because it takes the pressure off you to feel like you have to and you can hear yourself tap dancing when you're talking about something you know nothing about.

[00:48:17.900]

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Yeah, well you know a lot about goals and you got a brand new book, which I've had the privilege of twice reading, once to endorse it and wants to get ready for this interview, called All It Takes is a Goal and, you know, as I was rereading Jon, because goal-setting seems so big and in the future, and we're going to break it down a little bit, but I noticed that there is a parallel, maybe I'm wrong. Maybe I misread it in the way you think about goals versus habits. And I want to start there because you're a big habit guy. Like you have your routines, you got your rhythms and everything. What in your mind is the difference between a goal and a habit?

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JON ACUFF: Well, I mean, I always tell people, I don't really care which word you use as long as you're getting the stuff you want done. So, cause I had, I heard somebody once say like, I hate the word goals. I don't believe in goals. And I was like, what do you believe in? They were like commitments. And then they describe what was a goal. So like, I try to not get stuck on the nomenclature. For me, the, like one of the big differences about a habit versus a goal is that a goal is often singular where a habit is repetitive. So I'm not making a habit of trying to buy a mountain house. I'm not making a habit of trying to make a certain amount of money in a year. There's differences, where a habit. I'm just, I'm getting to something that repeats itself. It becomes part of my lifestyle. The other thing is that I'm learning to be flexible with my habits. I get too rigid with habits. That's where I kind of can get compulsive with it. Well, I didn't get my 17 minutes in today. So the whole day is shot because it's the habit was so rigid. So I like the flexibility of goals. So for instance, I'll tell people have 15 different ways you can accomplish that. So on the days, like you mentioned, in this interview, you'll read on a Kindle, like you'll read on a Kindle because you can't do other stuff on a flight. That's you having a list of actions that fit your learning bucket versus as a habit, I always have to read this the

same way every day to make sure the habit sticks versus going, regardless of I am where I am, I can move this thing forward, I can move this thing forward. That's been powerful for me about having goals that are flexible enough that I don't need to trigger the habit loop for me to do them.

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In fact, my world is, you know, when Ellie says I want to play Pickleball with you tomorrow.

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If I had the habit of I'm sorry I write from eight to ten like I just that's my habit. I always write from 8 to 10 and if I don't write from 8 to 10, like I won't get the writing done. I had a flexible goal of my real goal was I wanted to go to lunch with Ellie before she went back to college, when she suggested pickleball, the goal completely changed. It just pivoted over to like no. Let's go play Pickleball where you going to go to lunch on my real goal is to spend time with her. So I think sometimes for me, goals are really flexible.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: Yeah. So let's break that down. You have different categories of goals. You have, I'm going to let you talk about those. So when you think about goals, there's three different categories.

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JON ACUFF: So here's the metaphor I like to think about. If you imagine a ladder, 12-foot ladder, and that's how most people look at goals. They only have a rung at the bottom and a rung at the top. So they say, Carey, I want to start a podcast. Carey, I want to, you know, go to Italy. Carey, I want to make a million dollars. I want to write a book, whatever. And then they don't have any rungs in the ladder except the bottom one, which is that I've had the goal and then they look up and, and they think, okay, I just have to jump. I have to go for it. I have to try to grab that 12-foot, which is two feet taller than a basketball rim. And then I have to pull myself up.

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My version is, what if you had a ladder where there were six-inch rungs, every six inches, like every six inches, you had a rung. Could you climb to the top of that ladder over time pretty easily? Like, you probably could. You could probably before you, notice it realize, wow I'm at the top of this ladder, like I did that difficult thing. So, most people have a really hard time taking this big vision they have. And then

translating into small trackable daily things they can do. And so that's where for me, easy goals, middle goals, and guaranteed goals come in mind. So for instance, I was talking to a friend the other day Anthony O'Neill and he wants to hit a million subscribers on his YouTube channel. That's been his goal, his team's goal, I would never at the beginning say okay, you got two rungs, hit a million subscribers, and start the Channel.

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Good Luck between. I would never, I wouldn't even call that a guaranteed goal yet.

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But as he's climbed the ladder over time, by the time you get to the middle of the ladder, like that's happening, like I had him print out a photo of the million plaque and put it next to the 100,000 plaque he'd already gotten like he's guaranteed to hit that because he's already climbed that ladder bit by bit by bit by bit. I'm guaranteed to have a tenth book done. Not because I said, here's my huge goal but because I said Okay I want a lot of rungs.

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Now, imagine Carey, if I only had one rung at the top of the ladder that said finish the tenth book. Every day of the year that I work on that, I feel like a failure because I didn't finish it. I didn't finish the goal. Now imagine though if one rung says 200 words and I write it, what if rung says talk to Carey about the subtitle and I climb that. Every day I get to finish something, I feel successful, I look up at the end of the year. I have my tenth book done, and it wasn't magic. It was just a process. And so, that's what I mean by easy middle guaranteed, is that you climb the ladder in a way that it's easy to climb.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: Well, and that's why, you know, there's such a link in your thinking between habits and goals because, you know, you write almost every day and you're always writing something. You've narrowed that gap between your last book and your next book and you talk and all it takes in a goal about almost, you know, and it's not hubris, but the inevitability of selling a million books. Do you want to explain the math on that? Because I think, you know, you're right. If I sit here, never written a book or I've written five, you know, I think I've sold 250,000 books or something like that. But like, I don't have a goal to sell a million books. Now I'm going to write a few more, God willing, all that stuff. But how can you say I'm guaranteed to sell a million books?

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JON ACUFF: Well, I didn't make the goal at the very beginning of the goal. That would be ridiculous. Like, culture teaches us go big or go home. If your goal doesn't scare you, it's not big enough.

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But unfortunately, that stops a lot of people's goals, like a goal is already a challenging thing. Don't make it even more challenging and I'm fine with you having a big goal, I just want you to actually get there. So for me, I made that goal when I was x amount of years into my writing career and I could say, wow, I was in the middle. I was in the middle of the ladder. I could see the top.

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Like, at the bottom I couldn't, it was a 100-foot tall ladder, Carey.

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I couldn't if you said to me there's a thousand foot tall. All rung up there. Can you read what it says on be like, dude, I just have a blog, like, I'm like the 32, I've never even written a book and you're like, you gotta there's the that's not encouraging. If somebody said to me,

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Okay, you'll get to be on Global Leadership stage. It's going to take like, 15 years and you're at the start, that would have discouraged me.

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I couldn't have climbed that ladder, but I didn't say that to myself. Nobody said that to me.

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I remember, I did a book signing line once with John Maxwell which is a huge mistake. He's amazing. But it's a mistake because you sit there by yourself, while 100 people buy his book and you feel like a complete loser.

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So like people would get out of line with armfuls of his book and go, hey Jon, I like your blog, like not in a buy something kind of way, but I like your blog and they get back because they didn't lose their spot.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: You made me laugh. Yeah, thanks.

JON ACUFF: A dude, walked up tapped me on the shoulder and said 10 Years, buddy. 10 years.

[00:56:02.400]

That wasn't encouraging. Now, it was true but it wasn't encouraging. So for me, now that I'm in motion and now that I, you know, I'm in the middle of my ladder. I've done some easy goals, I wrote a blog, that's pretty easy. I wrote my first book, a little harder up the ladder. Wow, I wrote my fourth book, my fifth book, I'm in the middle of the ladder. Like now I have a writing career, what?

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Like I didn't have a writing career book one. I got \$30,000. After taxes and agent fees. That's \$13 grand. And people would come up to me at work and be like, you going to quit your job? And like, if you want 13 grand in a lottery, no one would go, you moving to Mexico, man, just gonna, you did it, dude. 13 whole grand. Like, whoo, Cancun, let's go. And so for me, when I'm in the middle of the ladder, I look up and go, I think I could do a million.

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Like I think I'm at like 860 right now. Like I think I can do a million.

[00:56:55.100]

I control that because I'm going to keep writing. What I don't control is, this next book will sell a million. I don't control that. I really don't. Like I control a lot of hustle. There's things I do control, but I don't control a single book selling a million.

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But I do control at this point, knowing what I know about the middle of the ladder, I'm getting to a million. Like, that's that's just math at this point, that's happening.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Yes. If you keep writing, it's just math, plus your back catalog keeps selling.

JON ACUFF: Yeah. So it's amazing cetera. Yeah, that's what I mean by a guaranteed goal, like that's guaranteed to happen and then the flip side of that, it'd be, you're a cyclist, you know, you rode a thousand more miles this year than you did last year, you're guaranteed to be a better cyclist. Like that's not, you can't go, I don't know, I hope so. Like no, you did a thousand more miles in the saddle, you're a thousand miles better. Like, that's a guarantee, Carey. And so like that's what I mean by guarantee is taking some of the magic out of it and going, no, no. This like this is happening like you're gonna write like this is gonna like John Lee Dumas like that episode is all about guaranteed goals where he was like, hey here's the here's how it works. Here's the system I built, he didn't say in that like you have no idea how any of it happened.

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But he does the opposite. He goes, here's how it happened. I'd love to teach you and I love that approach.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: Yeah, no, you're right. I mean, you know, when I started this podcast, I thought it was a crazy whim, maybe one day before I die, it'll be a million downloads. I never guessed 30 million but if we keep doing this, six episodes a month, we keep getting great caliber guests, we keep serving our audience, and you know, God willing, I can do this for a few more years. There's almost an inevitability to 40 and an inevitability to 50, right?

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Unless there's a massive disruption in the industry, or something like that.

JON ACUFF: If that happens, all bets are off, but I can't base my life off, you know, all bets are, and there'll be pauses. Like there was a pause for covid like, for me like, with public speaking but like, I'm working, you know, I worked beyond that pause. And so like I can't control that but there's some things that can controlled, that's what I want to lean into.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: Yeah. What is a chaos zone, Jon? You talk about a chaos zone.

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JON ACUFF: So there's, I, so where that came from was I met a lot of people who are high performers but they weren't high achievers. And what I mean by that was they

were capable of lots of potential. They just, it was sporadic. They didn't string it together.

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We've all, every leader on this call has felt that way or worked with somebody that way, who was, you know just because you're a high performer doesn't mean you're a high achiever. And so I started to study why that happened. And the reason why it happens is that high performers ricochet between three different zones. One end is the comfort zone. We all know the comfort zone. It's got a ton of conversation around it, a ton of press but the zone that really cripples more high performers than any other zone in my opinion is the chaos zone. And the chaos zone is where you try to do too much.

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So what happens is you're in the comfort zone, but then you get inspired, you hear, you know, a podcast, you read a book, you go to a conference.

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Oh, I'm gonna do the whole thing in a month and I'm gonna like I'm doing it all like and you go I'm going to learn yoga, and pay off debt, and date my spouse, and I'm going to travel more and you try to do it all and it all falls apart.

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It's the chaos zone. I relate it to the rabbit and the hare, the rabbit, and the Tortoise Story. The old fable, by Aesop, where he only had two gears, he was taking a nap by the side of the Road, or he was sprinting. He had no middle gear and he lost the race. Now, the turtle, the tortoise had a middle gear. He kept making steady progress, which is the potential zone, which is in between those two kind of opposite ends of the pole. He's kind of the Goldilocks zone, it's not too hot, not too cold, it's just right. Where you make steady deliberate, progress over time and you accomplished. A lot of things because you're in the middle of your potential.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: Okay, that's super helpful. So if someone wanted to set an easy goal, what can you give us some examples, you know, hittable, easy goals? Someone wants to work their way up the ladder. What's at the bottom of the ladder?

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JON ACUFF: Okay. Let's wear on a podcast. Let's say you want to start a podcast, so a hard goal would be I'm going to record my first 10 episodes. An easy goal is I'm going to brainstorm a couple names of the podcast. I'm going to find three podcasts I like. I'm going to listen to a couple of their episodes. I'm going to take a little bit of notes. I'm going to read John Lee Dumas' book. I'm going to do, you know I'm going to and I'm going to set a time frame. I'm going to do the first one for a week. So for the first week, all I'm doing is Googling possible names. That's all I'm doing. Second week, all I'm doing is listening to episodes of other people's podcast.

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That's easy. That's easy. And all the sudden you go, okay Yeah, I think I I think I want to do this and what you're doing Carrie at every level you're figuring out What price you want to pay? So if I if somebody tells me Jon I want to write a book and I go Well, why don't you read Bird by Bird by Ann Lamont? Like that's a really fun way to kind of get into writing if they go now I don't I'm not gonna do it.

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Well, you're not gonna do the other stuff that's even harder. Like if you won't do that the on ramp to the goal You're definitely gonna hate the other stuff.

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But so for an easy goal, like that's an example. Another example would be Okay, Jon, I want to run a marathon. Awesome. That's an awesome goal. Why don't we find an easy way to do that? Why don't you look up three shoe stores in your town? Why don't you go get fitted for a pair of sneakers? That's not hard. Like everybody on the planet can go get fitted for a pair of sneakers.

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Why don't you just Google, not join, Google, are there running clubs in your community? Is there a running club in Toronto? That has some slower paces you can do?

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Why don't you, you know, read one book about how to Pace your V2, whatever. Like all right cool versus I'm going to run every day this week because that's not sustainable, especially when you have no momentum and here's the other thing, Carey, at the start of a goal, a goal is fragile, a goal is so fragile, and you have to give it time to get strength. So, another example that would be, if you were starting a

podcast or writing a book, I wouldn't share those ideas too fast because they're probably not strong enough to stand under scrutiny.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: Yeah a lot of people are like, I'm going to lose 10 pounds and they post it immediately on Instagram and two months later they've gained 10.

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JON ACUFF: Yeah, it's not but it just wasn't strong enough. It was fragile and so you want it to gain some momentum so it has a fighting chance and you can say, okay, hey, this is going somewhere. This is strong enough now. And so, that's what I mean by easy goals, it's a short time frame, it's inexpensive. You don't have to change your whole life to do it. If your goal requires 12 hours of free time a week, that's not easy. It's really not. If you, if you say to yourself, I have to find 10 hours to write this week, and you're a busy, you know, parent, it's an, it's not happening. If you say, I'm going to find three ways to write for half an hour this week. It's 90 minutes. You got a lot of minutes in the week. You can probably do that. Like, that's easy, like, build up some rhythm.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: Can I give you an example and you test this out. So, you know, I've been saying for a while, I got to lose 10 pounds, whatever.

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And last year, 2022, in the spring, I got pretty motivated. I've been following this guy, Rob Carpathios, is his name on Instagram for a while. He has this Ditch Your Dad Bod thing, and I'm like, that's it, I'm joining.

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I'm gonna dive in. So it's a virtual training program, and I had my discovery call with him, and he works out with weights and a home gym and the whole deal. And I'm like, look, here's a couple of things. Number one, I live in the middle of nowhere. So, me to go to the gym, that's a two-and-a-half-hour endeavor. It's just not gonna work, right? It's just, I'm not gonna make that kind of time. Secondly, I'm on the road half the time. So if this doesn't work, like, I'm eating in restaurants, I can't do meal prep every Sunday and like, weigh my chicken to the gram like some of these guys do.

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JON ACUFF: And don't fly with your chicken. That's weird. That's weird, Carey, if you're on a flight with cold chicken, like no, that's too far.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: I was having visions of my emotional support animal, but that's another thing. An emotional support chicken.

[01:04:58.000]

JON ACUFF: In this story, you bring a chicken on as an emotional support and then you eat it at the Hyatt. Oh that's terrible.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: It's not gonna work. So I'm like, that doesn't work. It's got to fit into my lifestyle. And I said, he said, well, you can work out in a hotel gyms and I'm like, sometimes I have a really nice hotel and sometimes it's a broken elliptical, like, it's not going to work so he said we can do bodyweight training. I'm like great.

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So anyway, for about 16 months now, 17 months, we're doing bodyweight training. I've had a few up and down, so it's like squats, push-ups the whole deal. I'm on a very like, I can go and have ice cream, yesterday I had an ice cream cone and I was down half a pound this morning because it has to stay within certain macros, etc, etc. There's a lot of nutritional freedom. The bottom line, was very replicable. I could do it. It was really hard at first. Doing those workouts off. He starts yet three a week and then you move to four and long story short, I ended up down 20 pounds. Got my little twenty-pound plaque, it's awesome. And he kept saying, it's inevitable, like if you just work the program and it worked into my lifestyle. So, you know, I don't even go to the gym at a hotel. I just put a towel down on the floor in my room and that's where I do my workout. It's very sustainable.

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That's how you start with an easy goal, kind of moves to a middle goal, and then eventually you get guaranteed like, yeah, you do this and you're going to lose 20 pounds.

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JON ACUFF: Exactly. And he didn't say to you at the start, I need a 16-month commitment. Like he didn't say like, Carey, you need to sign a 16-month

commitment. Like that would have been like, Oh, I can't do that. And he didn't say, you're going to have nine workouts. You're going to have, no, that's exactly what I'm talking about. He said the word inevitable. I say the word guaranteed. Um, and I talk about that in the book. My buddy who owns a CrossFit gym gave me a CrossFit workout. He knows I travel. So I have a 30-minute in the hotel room workout where it is body weight. And before that, before I had the freedom of flexibility, again, like rigid goals are fragile goals. So if you said, if he said to you, you have to work out in a hotel gym, you would do it less.

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But what happens for me is I go, I got 30 minutes and I can do pushups and I have a chart and I can write them down and then I can text him for some accountability, like, and then I can do it.

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Um, today I did my 85th CrossFit workout of the year.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: Wow.

JON ACUFF: And so I and I know that because I'm tracking it and I know you know and I make it fun to. I listen to an audiobook while I'm doing it

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Like I get to listen to whatever music and I picked my favorite room. The first year, I did it on the porch. This year, we renovated our family room. I'm doing it in there.

JON ACUFF: Yeah, exactly. So you find ways to enjoy it more and more and more and more. And and that's what I mean, again I think sometimes we we want it to be really, really big right out of the gate and I get that, it's fun, it's sexy, it's shiny, but I'm more concerned with, does it lead to long-term change. So you 16 months later is way cooler than if you bought some crazy thing and had a great three weeks and never did it again and Toni was like hey, what are you gonna do with the Peloton? And you're like, I'm about to use it again? I'm about to do it. Don't just don't worry about it. I'm about to like that would be frustrating where this guy you have the exact opposite experience. So it sounds like he's yeah he's exactly what I'm talking about.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: What else about the framework? The easy middle guaranteed goals is it important for leaders to understand why?

JON ACUFF: I think it's important, I talk about in the book, reading the book backwards, because nobody dreams of easy goals so it is important to have, you didn't dream of, I can't I want to lose half a pound. That's my dream. That would have motivated you it's important to have the big thing so the 10 lbs to 20 lbs whatever it is the plaque, it's important to have that. So as a leader you have to have that vision like you can't pitch incremental change to a team and think they'll be excited.

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So like you can't say to them, like, hey guys, we're gonna change things by 3%. It's gonna be amazing.

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You have to pitch the big vision and then kind of go in reverse and then build the small steps along the way. Because nobody gets excited. Like nobody says, my goal is to learn 10 Italian words. No, their goal is I want to speak Italian. And then they kind of figure out, can I learn 10 words today? Can I learn 20 words today? So as a leader, you have to be the one that paints that picture of what's possible, of the vision, and then translate that into, okay, here's the steps along the way that we're going to do to get us there. Here's where we're headed. Here's how, you know. And then you have to touch the goal a lot of times. If we're just talking about leadership purely.

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You have to touch the goal more times than you think, because you can't assume people remember, you can't assume people are tracking it, you can't assume, you know, it's being taken care of. I'm talking to a team, this is my third time. I've talked to them in September, this big multi-billion dollar company and they know and we're talking about this September you is smarter than January you.

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So we're doing a big event in September to reassess, let's review where we are. What have we learned? What do we change? Like, here's what we thought was true in January. What's been true? The last seven months. What do we need to do?

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So, I think as a leader, goals, you can't just set and then hope they, you know, kind of work like Keith Cunningham, who wrote that book, *The Road Less Stupid*. I love that he said there's no such thing as passive income in the same way that there's not passive marriages or passive health. Everything takes active.

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Now, I think there's residual, like, you build up stuff like there's residual, but there's not a passive goal where you set it, and then forget it. And then it takes like motivation, doesn't work that way, habits will work that way goals, don't work that way. You have to touch it a lot, especially if you're a leader.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: So Jon, money has been something that you've had an interesting relationship with. Talk about how money fits into your goal system. What I loved about the way you talk about it is I think a lot of us, we have certain, as we're disciplined in our lives and we're good at our goals, right? Like I'm one of my goals for this year was positive kitchen. It's very easy to do, just don't criticize when you're in the kitchen, because I'm pretty quick to go, like, hey, we need to get this done. We said 6 o'clock, it's 6:05, where is everything? And I was like, just a jerk, just a jerk. Like positive kitchen. So we've been doing fairly well on that. That's easy, but there's always like fitness was one of those for me. Yeah, I biked, but I out-ate my biking, right? Like that's not hard to do. Pretty easy to out-eat an exercise plan or whatever. So yeah, you talk about money. Walk us through that journey and how that impacted you.

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JON ACUFF: Yeah, I mean, I'm still very much in the middle of it where I'm looking at old beliefs I have or old soundtracks related to money. So for me, it was a topic I avoided. Like I tried to, to use your exercise example, I tried to out-hustle a bad budget.

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So like I, you know, instead of looking at the money instead of dealing with it I go I can work more. I can do more, I can do more, I can do more, I can just make more and where somebody might go, yeah, but if you tweaked like three things in your budget, you wouldn't have to scramble so much. Like you wouldn't have to be like with you and biking if you wanted to eat something terrible and you're like I just need to ride 5000 miles this week on my bike and then I can somebody might go carry, you could tweak this other thing and you don't have to spend 5,000 miles on your bike? Like there are ways around this. So, for me, that was a topic that I really avoided. I was really afraid of it. I joked that it's like, spiders and money for me. Like, I feel like confused by it and so I'm in the middle of really assessing? What do I believe about money? Why do I believe that? Where did I find? You know, where did

I learn that success is bad or where do I, where do you know where my self sabotage?

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You know, because I have a certain amount of money that I think is okay, and if I get too close to that, I have to kind of pull myself back. That's a real thing. So yeah, so I would say that was but again like what I like to do is make things goals because then I can do them. So you made positive kitchen a goal, like where one of the goals I made was to be less offended and so I made a goal where I tracked that because I found myself being angry at things that didn't deserve the amount of anger. I was giving them. And so I was like and then I heard Earl Nightingale, say essentially like the size of a man is directly related to the size of the problems he gets concerned with, and I was like oh, I'm a small man. Like I'm a like like here's an example podcasting-wise.

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Somebody emailed me and was like, hey, you're gonna be on our podcast. And they're like, do you have a good mic? Should we send you one? And I took that as such a personal insult.

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Like, I have my own mic. I know about mics.

[01:13:56.400]

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Like, it's a Sure SM7B. Do you have any idea?

JON ACUFF: Exactly, dude, my ego, and my like bowed up and I had to pause and go, wait a second. So with money, I'm now in the habit of saying, this thing frightens me, can I make it a goal? So the title of the book is All It Takes Is A Goal because I think there's areas of our life where we go, my life would be better, my life would be different. I'd have more of my potential if I knew how to live in that space. So I wanna take the fear out of that and go, all it takes is a goal. What would it take for you to turn money into a goal, or relationships into a goal, or your fitness into a goal, versus a scary thing that's really big?

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So, for me, I'm working on money goals. I have a big guaranteed goal that I'm trying to work toward I'm being deliberate. I've got small money goals and I'm working on. I'm talking to other people, like I ask people, what are their broken soundtracks

around money because I wanted to learn from other people. One that really surprised me a teacher said in teaching a broken soundtrack, we believe, is you teach for the outcome, not the income. And she said, I hate that one because nobody, who prints children's books set in at the factory that prints Books doesn't go. Remember guys, we're underpaying you but you do it for the outcome, not the income. And she was like screw that I'm a teacher but I'm going to figure out how to have financial freedom. Like I'm going to, I don't accept that to be a teacher means, you're broke. I don't accept that. And but that was a soundtracked and how her space and then like you can I mean like pastors oh my gosh, there's so much money stuff.

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Paul had to learn how to be in poverty and with riches. Like he said, I learned how to be in both. I think there's a ton of people that have over-focused on the poverty part and and have not spent a second going, how do I be okay with good stuff? Like, how do I be okay with 6s? Like how do I like, that's a tricky subject. So I feel like I'm I'm at the beginning of that Journey but I think as leaders, we tend to again ricochet back and forth between ideas. And so I think when people got really kind of stuck on prosperity we ricochet the other direction.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Right. Because are so averse to Prosperity, which I think that's, that's not a bad thing to be averse to it, but then the other option is what?

JON ACUFF: Yeah, yeah. So that's the thing. I'm in the middle of right now.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Yeah. So guaranteed goal. How do you know when something is a category, like a candidate, to become a guaranteed goal, what is the threshold?

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JON ACUFF: Well, so for me, it's, do I have proof? Like once I've gotten to, once I've done an easy, once I'd run a middle, like I have proof. So I'm turning, you know, again, I'm experimenting, I'm trying, I'm testing, I'm figuring out, do I wanna do it? I'm also quitting goals. Like not every easy goal will turn into a guaranteed goal. There's things I try all the time that I go, that was dumb. That doesn't fit my life, did not return the ROI I wanted to. Like I've joked with you about this, like drinking a gallon of water a day, it's not a good goal for me.

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It's just not like, I hate that goal.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: In the bathroom every 20 minutes.

[01:17:06.500]

JON ACUFF: I'll be in a 90-minute keynote and need to go to the bathroom. Like that doesn't fit my life, dude. For what? Like I tell a client, I know I'm trying to serve you, but ultimately my God is a water goal. Like, I don't deify my goals.

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So like, if something doesn't fit, like the goal is for me, not me for the goal.

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So I can tell, something's gonna be a guaranteed goal because I've done some easy goals. I've put in some time, I've put in some effort, I might have even put in some money. I maybe invested a little bit, like I don't, I'm not guessing there's a guaranteed goal. I have proof at that point, which is why it's inevitable. Like when you're a year into working out with this guy you weren't like I hope next week and goes, well, like I might quit next week and you're like nah, this is happening.

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Like this is this is in motion.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: There was an inflection point at which I thought oh this program actually works. Just yeah with it and then it became a sustainable lifestyle.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: So what I say to people like when people ask me specific questions like well how do I know which will be a guaranteed goal or another specific question I get from people is, how many goals should I have? And that's a totally fair question. And they want me to say, 4.8, 5.7. But what I always say is as many as you can, as many as helpful. So what I mean by that is have ten if you've got the kind of lifestyle that can benefit from ten, have two, like, I don't care how many you have as long as they're not competing. And what I mean by competing goals is if you said to me, Jon, I want to be a lot closer with Toni and my kids this year that's a big goal for me. And I also want to Travel 300 Days by myself to speaking of it I would be like, hey Carey. I don't know how to tell you this, those two goals are in direct competition. So for me, I think I don't know anybody who's life is so simple that they can only have one goal where they go, I'm only going to focus on my health. I'm gonna let my relationships kind of, ugh, good luck.

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I always, whenever I see a goal influencer online who's like, really aggressive and really hardcore, I always want to like, hear from their spouse.

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Like I always want to hear from their friends because I have this guess that they don't have a lot of relationships or the spouse is like yeah, he's the worst he gets up at 3 a.m. And we tried to go on vacation and he had to like he had to pick a resort based on the gym and so it didn't have anything for my kids because it had to be based on the gym that the resort had, and you're like, so I'm not trying to make my life like that. I'm trying to say okay, how many goals can I do? How can I serve other people with the goals? How can I encourage my family to have goals? Like how can I make it a healthy really fun part of my life?

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And then dude, the longer I live this way the harder it gets to believe it doesn't work. So when my ninth book comes out, I'm gonna have a really hard time telling you goals don't work because it's my ninth book I didn't write books for the first 34 years of my life. Like I got plenty of evidence of what doesn't work. 34 years.

[01:20:04.700]

I got them 47, I got 13 years of evidence of like, oh man, if you try this stuff and then you couple that I have, this thing called the guaranteed goals community, where we teach people goals, I have hundreds and hundreds of real people that are like, oh, I got my like, one of my favorite stories in the book, a woman got her degree from the car rider pick-up line. So during the car rider pick-up line and as she picked up her kids, she would watch 15 minutes of a lecture. She would read a little bit of a textbook. And over time, she did that enough that she got her degree.

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I don't have to guess, like, do goals work? And I think if I stay on this path, ten years from now when we are talking and you've got a hundred million, you know, listeners on your, on your podcast. That will go, goals, they work, that's pretty fun.

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And again, that's not I don't think it's hubris.

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I just think it ends up being proof and it ends up being encouragement. So like one of the things that people ask me about all the time is imposter syndrome. They go, how do you get over imposter syndrome? And the only way I know, like the only way I found is with work, with results. So when imposter syndrome gets loud for me and

goes, you're not a real writer. Like, this book. You're not a real writer, this other person's real writer. You're not a real writer. I go. Oh, this is awkward. But that shelf has like nine books I wrote on it. Like I feel like Like, that's what writers do. Like, I have a stack of, I think I've done the thing. And so when you exercise for 16 months, and some voice in your head that's discouraging goes, what are you even doing? You're not in shape. What do you like? You're not a real exercise person? Like, what are you even doing this for? Because that happens, you'll go. Oh, this is so awkward. This is my plaque. Have you met my plaque? This is my twenty pounds off plaque. Like and then I don't feel like I'm an imposter. So I that's the thing, is that it becomes it becomes a circle

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Where you do a little bit of the work and you get the feeling and then you want to do more of it and you get the feeling you want to do more of it and you get the feeling and I genuinely believe finishing a goal is one of the best feelings in the world. Like I really do. And so I always say like happy busy people don't have time to hate other people. Like happy busy people don't have time to criticize people online. Like I'm too busy doing cool fun stuff and I don't have time for it. I love when somebody says, did you see that mean thing somebody said about you? I'm like, no, I don't have any idea about that. Like I was writing a book today, and they're like, do you want to know what it is? I was like, no, I'm good. Like no, why would you like, no, I'm good.

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I don't need that. Like I'm good. So for me, it just becomes a really fun way to live life and I don't want to stop it.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: Yeah, I love the idea of guaranteed goals thinking of the inevitability of some things. That's highly, highly motivating. I remember when, we're fortunate, you know, we were able to pay off our mortgage, and watching it go down every month at first, it feels so impossible, right? And then you're like oh it's getting smaller and smaller and smaller and then it's just gone one day.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: Dude, and you get to a point where you're right. Where it crosses over and you're like no this is happening like this is weird real. It would I would crawl to the Ooh, the bank to pay this last check. Like you weren't going to get to where you are five payments away and say to Toni, on second thought, I don't think we should do this. Like ten payments away, you weren't gonna be like Toni

hear me out, what about a horse? Maybe we should buy a horse. Like, you were at that was inevitable, and then like it happened in your and then when you have a guaranteed goal that happens, you get obsessed with other things. So that's the fun part about life is when you go, okay, what else? So I'll give you an example that's kind of the reverse. This summer, Jenny, and I were talking about a sports car.

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Like, I've always wanted a sports car. Don't have a sports car, I've always wanted one and she was like, you know, I think you'd be anxious in it. I think you would park it. A million miles away, I think you'd be nervous every time you drove it that some teenager was going to hit it and I was like, yeah, you're right, I could see that. And so then like a week later during July, when I was thinking, I thought, you know, what's weird? I just let my fear tell me what kind of car I drive. So, I let my anxiety set the car limit. Like I said to my anxiety. Hey, is it okay if I have a Volkswagen and it was like will accept that, that's acceptable. But then I was like what are other parts of my life and my leadership where fear is getting to set the day?

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Like what are the other things in my life where maybe it's an amount of money you can make, or maybe it's the type of leadership you get but I don't want to live a life where fear defines what I'm capable of and then I try to live slightly under that. I'd much rather go, yeah, I would be a little nervous about a sports car, but I'm gonna work on that. I'm gonna turn that into a goal because I don't want fear to say you're more of like a Kia. Like have you ever thought about like a Kia, Jon, like that's your level of stress that you can handle. Like no, I'd rather elevate what I'm capable of in any area of my life and go, I made it a goal and now it's different, and there's areas my life where I've done well at that, but there's a lot of areas where I'm just now looking and going. Oh Okay. Okay, here's the last thing I'll say, I'm sure it'll be not the last thing, I heard my overheard myself the other day saying, I have plateaued in my speaking career fee-wise because I'm not a celebrity, so you and I both know celebrities who get five times what we get, and do q&a's. So it's because they want a Super Bowl, whatever. They make a ton of money, they don't do a keynote. Like, and I heard myself saying that to somebody and I realized, well, that's a broken soundtrack, that really is. Now the three questions of soundtracks, Is it true? Is it helpful? is it kind? It is true, it's true. There is a level to being a celebrity. is it helpful for me to say that? It's not. Because what it makes me do is not work hard, it makes me give up, is it kind? Of course, it's not. So what if instead I said, I'm going to create such good content and have such amazing customer service that I work around the celebrity level.

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Like, I'm going to get around it, like I see it, it's an obstacle. I'm just going to go around it. I'm going to figure out my way around it now it's a goal. Now I can do something with it, but again it starts with that overhearing and going, wow what did what's the outcome of that thought? The outcome is, don't try, am I okay with that? Like am I at 47? Okay, with being like okay, I've never Like, I've never won a Super Bowl, I can't like no, I'm not okay with that. Well what's what do I need to do with that? If I make it a goal, what does that look like? And then I can make it a tactical tangible goal to actually like, serve clients so well, they're excited to bring me back. And now we've got a bigger relationship and I can do that. Like, this book is written with the attitude of what do I do with this on a Tuesday? That's all the stuff I teach, all the stuff I speak. I'm trying to think, if I'm reading this, if I'm sitting in the audience, that's great, that's interesting, it's inspiring, but what do I do with it on a Tuesday? That's the kind of stuff I like.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: Great preaching test too.

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JON ACUFF: Yeah, so like for me, I know I can turn that broken thought into a true thought and then on a Tuesday, I can follow up with a client in such a great way that creates such a good experience for them that they're more encouraged to bring me back to speak again. Like that I can do, that's a goal.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: Well, I love that we're having this conversation too, Jon, because you've mentioned humility or hubris a few times, but I think in the church in particular, there's a lot of people who either attend a church or work at a church who listen to the show.

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There's a false humility that really like if our god-given potential is here, we'll stop here. Right? Like what's true about maybe the sports car is also true about my preaching ability or where we're going to take the message that I feel I've been entrusted with, or our leadership lids, and there's almost this fear of success or fear of size, and I think it was Irenaeus who said, the glory of God is man fully alive, and I went to see John Mayer in concert and thing that amazed me is that guy doesn't hold back, like and his guitar are basically one. He's just out there.

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JON ACUFF: He's like he doesn't care if he looks weird either. He looks very weird a lot of the time.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Tongue sticking out and he's into it. He's lost the art and I'm like, as a communicator, I gotta get out there. Like as a question asker, as a writer, I have to get out there. I have to leave it all out on the field and there's a part of me that holds back and so it's going to be really interesting for me, moving forward to think about easy, middle, and then guaranteed goals when it comes to realizing the potential. So you die with it all out on the field, not holding back going, well, if I tried harder or I hadn't put those lids on, you know, because this can be used for really, really, great purposes. You know, and and I think I think often I mean what are your thoughts on false humility in the church?

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JON ACUFF: Well, for me, I think of the landowner who gives out the 5 and the 2 and the 1 Talent. And I'm a double talent guy, like whether that's two talents or five, I can't say but if I got to I'm gonna double it and then there's a party. So there's not a moment where you double it and the landowner who is God goes it was, no, you shouldn't have doubled it. I wanted you to only like one and a half it. Like, no, there's a party, there's a celebration. Like that's what, for me, part of my message is like, let's dig it, let's grab a shovel. You buried your talent. Like, let's go double it. Like, what does that look like? Where did, you know, let's go do that.

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Like, how do we ask and knock and receive? And I think that for me, that idea of the false humility comes back to, is God a good God or not a good God? Like, if he's really a good God and he has your best in mind, and he, you know, he is a Father who gives amazing gifts. Like, we're told we wouldn't give our kid a snake. Like, and we're humans. Imagine what God gives. Like, I feel like we really struggle with that. He is a good, generous, lavish God, because if he's not if he's an okay God, like then okay. Like a broken soundtrack, I've had somebody the other day say, I know God will provide enough. And I was like no he's not, we're not told he's an enough God, he's a runs over God, he's a cup runs over. Like, so when somebody says like I know he'll provide exactly my needs, that's not what the Bible says. The Bible is like it's gonna run over, it's gonna be more than you need. It's going to be wildly generous, so, for me, I feel like when we pull back, we don't have a pullback God, like we have a God that's like, no, and if I pull back there is like for me to worry and pull back, because

pulling back is worry. So for me to have false humility, for me to pull back to worry, the the first thing I have to believe is there is no God.

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Like because there's not like in that situation there must not be a God because I'm now God, because I'm worried, I can't do things. So then I go, but I can see his hand a lot of places. I've seen the sunset, I believe in them. So okay there is a God but he must not be that good because I can't give my heart fully to him because I'm going to pull back and save some of it because I don't really want to get hurt.

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But so for me, if I really believe in a wildly generous passionate God, then like I'm going to go all out like I'm I have to go all out and as I go all out and go I did the thing. It's like he goes, there's even more, I won't out God him. Like when I go I trust this thing. I'm building this thing. I won't have a moment He goes that was too big like you never. You never see God once in the Bible say I think you should play it safer.

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Like I'm not capable of that, I think you should pull back. Like it's hard to find an example in the Bible where God is like, I think you should pull back, I can't handle that. Like if anything, I feel like we go, here's this little gift.

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Like, here's the funny thing to me. The only thing the boy with the fish and loaves did was bring them.

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We don't get a single passage about his hustle. Like we just don't. Like we brought them. So my thing is like, I'm gonna bring all the fish and all the loaves I have and then I get to watch this miracle of how he uses it. Like that's not on me. So how dare I go, here's how big the miracle can be or it can only feed this amount. Like that's not on me. Like it's really not. I say to people all the time, I'm the CEO of my actions, not the CEO of my outcomes.

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Meaning I'm going to act on these things, like I'm gonna, and then what God does with them, God's gonna do with them, and they're going to be bigger than I can imagine.

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Like, they're always bigger than I could imagine. So that's how I mean from the church, yeah, I feel like we should be high-performing. I think we should be deeply in love with the talents that we've been given, because they reflect the Creator. I heard somebody the other day say, it's not arrogance to be confident in who you are, unless you think you created yourself.

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I don't think I created myself. So for me to celebrate the things I'm capable of is an homage to the God I believe created me.

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I can stumble and pride and ego and all those things.

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But like, nah, like I've played it small, it's not fun. Like I've done both like I know which one's a lot more fun.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: Well that's a great place to finish man. Whatever God gave you, don't hold back. Don't hold back. So the book is called All It Takes is A Goal. What came first the podcast or the book? Did you have the idea for the book before you did the podcast?

[01:34:02.400]

JON ACUFF: No, the podcast came first. The podcast came first and then the book came from not feeling like I lived up to my potential in college and then I thought, well, what am I gonna do with that? Like those four years are gone but the next 40 are available. Do I want to sit in that regret? Or do I want to live in my potential? And that's where the book came from.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: Awesome, Jon, it's available everywhere books are found. Where can people find you?

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JON ACUFF: Jonacuff.com. And then I read the audiobooks, so if you're an audio person listening to podcasts, 10 bonus stories. And then my podcast is called All It Takes Is A Goal. And you can find me all over the place on social media.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: Awesome. Jon, thank you.

JON ACUFF: Thanks, Carey.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Man, I enjoy Jon. And we talk all the time and I am thrilled to bring you conversations like that. And we got a lot more coming up for you. If you enjoyed that and would like more, you can get show notes and transcripts over at careynieuwhof.com/episode596. We're also on YouTube. Lots of you are watching on YouTube these days, although audio is still like, I don't know, ten to one or a hundred to one. People listen over watching, probably a hundred to one, maybe a thousand to one. Anyway.

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Lots of you listen, and a few of you watch, but we're over on YouTube as well. So you can check that all out my website. Careynieuwhof.com is a gateway to everything and you don't even have to know how to spell that because if you get it slightly wrong, Google will help you out. And I got a couple things. I'd love to get in your hands. They're both free.

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First, if you want to grow generosity in your church, go to engagegenerosity.com. I will give you my free guide on four steps to engage your church around money, in generosity.

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And I would like in partnership with Belay, to get their Power Productivity Guide to you for free, if you want to be more productive and who doesn't text CAREY to 55123

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So we got a lot of great guests coming up. I am so pumped for my conversation with Arthur Brooks. He wrote a pivotal book, his next book is with Oprah which is

fascinating, Dave Ramsey, Jenni Caton, Judah and Chelsea Smith. Mike Todd, John Crist, and whole lot more coming up on the show.

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And if you subscribe, you'll never miss an episode. But next episode Matt Tressider, we talked about where bad leaders come from, it's super honest, how to deal with brutal feedback, secrets to a great one-on-one meeting, and why management is dead. Here's an excerpt.

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Matt Tressider: So I think a really important place to start on this conversation is where do bad leaders come from? Because I think it's unfair for us to think that a bad leader wakes up that day, or let's just say 99% of leaders don't wake up that day thinking, how do I make my people's lives terrible today? They just don't. So, why do we have a huge part of the workforce, both in the workplace and within ministry, where people have Sunday scaries not looking forward to coming to work on Monday because the relationship with their leader, the leader is not intentionally doing that. So I think it's It's because they're not equipped.

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They've never actually been shown the way, they've never actually been shown the path. Or number two, they're not being intentional. They don't realize that them not checking in on a personal front, or not providing feedback on a more coaching front, the damage that that's doing long-term.

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Carey Nieuwhof: That's next time on the podcast. And because you listened to the end, let me tell you about something cool. I am always trying to find new podcasts and that can be hard. I mean, there's a gazillion out there. I don't know if that's quite the math, but it's close. And we started an Art of Leadership Network, and these are curated shows. And I would love for you to follow them because you can hear great leadership content from hosts like Adam Weber, Chris Cook, Jenni Catron, Toni Nieuwhof, Rob Meder, Kevin Jennings and a whole lot more. I have to do is follow the Art of Leadership Network on Insta and you will always know where to find the leadership conversations you need. So, just search for the Art of Leadership Network next time you're on Insta or click the link in the episode and we'll see you inside the network. And that's that little thing you here at the very beginning where it's like, ting, The Art of Leadership Network. Yeah, that's a network and we got a bunch of shows, Sean Morgan's on there, Brad Lomenick, and a whole lot more. So

check it out. Thank you so much for listening everybody. I so appreciate you and I hope we have helped you identify and perhaps even break a growth barrier you're facing.