



Carey Nieuwhof

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<https://predictablesuccess.com/carey-nieuwhof/>

Note: *This transcript has been lightly edited for clarity and understanding. There may still be grammatical and spelling errors,*

Les McKeown: Hi everybody it's Les McKeown here. Welcome back to 'Scale! with Predictable Success, where we get to talk with leaders who have succeeded in truly helping either their own organization or others to scale. And today I'm delighted to be speaking with Carey Nieuwhof, who has not just become a friend over the years and a colleague - Carey and I have shared platforms all over the United States. He's been a client of mine. He's challenged me. He's developed my leadership skills, Carey, you and I have done just about everything that's legal for two people in our business to do together. And it's just a delight to have you on the podcast.

Carey Nieuwhof: Welcome. Hey, thanks for answering that tweet. I think I sent you a direct message or even an ask - what was that? Six, seven years ago? At least. It might've been eight years ago. And thank you for getting back to me and it's been a joy and a privilege, and I've learned so much and talk about you to all kinds of leaders and share your material and insight and wisdom as often as I can. So thank you.

Les McKeown: And thank you too. It's been a long mutual journey and we're going to get into quite a bit of that during our chat together. I know the folks are going to really, really enjoy it. I know we've got a specific group of people who actually know you better on my podcast - who know you better than they know me, because they found me through you. I've been on your podcast a number of times, and every time I appear on your podcast, the subscriptions to my list go through the roof. So we have a huge number of people who know Carey and know you very well. And then we have a group of folks who know of you, but haven't really got to know you that well. And then we've a bunch of people who are hearing from you for the first time. So I'd love to start Carey, by just you sharing a little bit about your own path to where you are now, what you're doing now and tell us a little bit about what the last couple of months have been like for you.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, I'll try to give you the 60-second version as opposed to the 60 minute version, but yeah, it was a really unusual career path. So it took me down a lot of places. When I was eight, I decided I wanted to be a lawyer, but on the way to law school, did a degree in history. But even before that, when I was 16, I walked into the local radio station, asked them if they were hiring, asked them for a job and they put me on the air. So I did radio for about eight



years. Eventually made it to law school. graduated law school, worked for a year in downtown, Toronto in LA. but in that process felt a call into ministry. So I'm a person of faith.

Carey Nieuwhof: I'm a Christian, was going to be a Christian lawyer if that's even possible (Les you can tell me if that's possible!). But, I did meet my wife in law school who is a lawyer. And, anyway, finished the board admission course, got called to the bar, went into seminary, thought I might have the gifts for ministry and thought, Oh, we'll test it out on like three little churches that we had heard about north of Toronto. So we came up here, they were really small - six, 14 and 23 was the average attendance. And 25 years later, we're still here. So serving the same people in the same church, but the journey has taken a lot of twists and turns. We sold those original three buildings, built a new building then exited the denomination, and started over again about 12 years ago as Connexus church.

Carey Nieuwhof: We're double portable, built a broadcast location. I handed over leadership to my successor, Jeff Brodie, who some of your listeners will know. It started about five years ago as part of a planned transition. And actually, I don't know when this will air, but at the end of 2020 is my last time on staff at Connexus, so I'll be fully exited. And as a hobby I started to really get interested in writing books, speaking - where, as you know, we met on the speaking tour - podcasting and basically spend most of my time building into leaders right now. Faith leaders, not for profit leaders, business leaders, trying to help them with leadership, advice. And like you, you know, the whole world pivoted in March of 2020. So I went from spending, I think I flew 150,000 miles last year to different countries and all over the U S speaking. And then, you know, that kind of dried up. I don't know about for you, but it was pretty fast overnight in March for me. So I went from like a full dance card to like sitting in the corner alone, but we pivoted to a hundred percent digital company and have been there, well, for about five months now. And frankly I'm loving it. So that's the a, well, it wasn't 60 seconds...

Les McKeown: I want to go back to something that you talked about, which is the leadership transition that you made. You know, for our listeners, one of the things that I'd let them to know is that, and I've said this to you before privately, you're one of the very few people, literally a handful, maybe three, four people that I can think of who in the sphere that you operate in, which historically has been within the church environment. - whenever I meet other people, you're a first name exchange - by by which I mean, somebody says, Oh, you must know Carey, or I'll say, Oh, that means you must know Carey. And everybody knows who you're talking about. Nobody has to say 'Carey Nieuwhof', which is just as well because you can't spell it. Nobody can spell it anyway, you've got way too many vowels in there's - even worse than mine, but you've got that position of authority.

Les McKeown: And you built that in your communications work. Let me call it that, that we'll talk about shortly. But you, as you said, you started by building churches and you built Connexus, and as you say, many of the folks will know of Connexus through Jeff Brodie, who was one of our featured speakers last year at ScaleCon. And, we had a great interview with him beforehand



as well. But you did something - I know the story well, because I've heard it from both sides - that most leaders for profit not-for-profit just suck at, which is you made a really good exit. And for some people that's an oxymoron, because, you know, "I'm never going to leave". I'd like you to share a little bit about first of all, why you thought it was necessary. And secondly, how did it turn out so successful? I mean, Jeff speaks so highly of it. The church members speak highly of it. Because as you say, you're about to step away completely. So what prompted you to do it? Most people wouldn't leave when they're flying high, as you were. And secondly, why was it so successful?

Carey Nieuwhof: I guess, you know, you don't always understand your motivations in the moment, but the way you ask the question, the first thing that pops into my mind is around the time that I went into radio. So my parents who are both immigrants to Canada from Holland, started a business together, a tool and mold shop - tool and die shop. So some of your listeners may know that industry very well. I think, you know it a little bit too, but anyway,

Les McKeown: I owned one - the last tool and die businesses in Europe!

Carey Nieuwhof: I think I thought you did. I thought you owned one. So you know it well, and I worked in the shop, you know, I was in charge of toilets and, driving the truck. So it was a 16 year old kid, you know, wow. I got to drive the pickup truck that was fun. And to do deliveries for my dad and my dad had just started, but he pulled me aside and he said, Carey, I would love for you to run the company one day, which I think is everybody's dream right? And you know, I wasn't the best teenage son. And I just said to him, apparently, according to my mother, this is an exact quote, "Dad. That is the last thing I want to do with my life." So after piercing his heart, it's like, I feel bad about that, but I knew something at 15 or 16 when he asked me that question, I'm not good at math. Like, I'm just not good at math.

Carey Nieuwhof: And I watched, even in that, the company became much bigger, but it was a little startup, but, you know, I watched what the guys were doing, the journeymen in the shop and, you know, I'm like, I'm not good at this. I can't do X, Y axes. And you know, you're, you're measuring as you know, to a thousandth of an inch. And I'm like, I thought a foot was close enough, but when you're making precision taillights for General Motors, you better not blow it. And I said, dad, I know I could run the office, but I can't figure out the shop. And I said, if you move me to the office, the guys in the shop would never respect me and I can never run the company. And I don't know how I knew that at 16, but that was my suspicion. And then I watched my parents for 25, 30 years in business and they were, they were very successful.

Carey Nieuwhof: they're retired, they're both alive. We have a great relationship, but one of the things they really struggled with was succession. And you know, it wasn't an option for me. I saw it all the time in the ministry when no real successor came down. So what they did is what happens to 96% of all businesses. The company died with the founder and, you know, they, they had a really good sell off. They did very well at it. All their employees got other jobs, but they



just wound down the business when it was time to go. And if you look at it, that's what happens with a lot of successful churches. So all of a sudden, I'm in the church world and I'd had a couple of decades in the lead pastor seat, which is really the CEO, the senior leader seat in church world for business leaders.

Carey Nieuwhof: So I was kind of in charge and I just watched churches go through this life cycle. First of all, churches that were started by their founder, that would kind of die without their founder, or it was never as good as when, you know, when pastor Carey was pastor. So I watched that, but then you could look at even the history of historic congregations that have been around for 50, a hundred years and people would talk about the good old days. And they would say, Oh, in the seventies when, so, and so was here in the nineties when we had a good pastor, we had a good minister and the church might grow to 500, a thousand. And then it's right back down to 180 right. Or 82 or whatever the number happens to be. And I realized because we were blessed, we even, you know, the churches were so small, but we were dozens and then hundreds.

Carey Nieuwhof: And then by the time I handed it off to Jeff, we'd broken a thousand and I realized, this is really special. Like this does not - I know that that happens in the U S all the time. And if you're listening in Dallas, you have 10 churches of a thousand right around the corner from you right now. But in Canada, according to Warren Bird, we have less than a hundred, I think 150 churches of over a thousand people in the entire nation. And in our denomination at the time it never happened. And so I thought this is really special. I can't mess this up. And this is bigger than me. And then I had seen succession done so poorly. I had seen, you know, I'd seen leaders go, well, I told you, Oh. Or they were almost, and listen, I feel all these emotions. So I'm not, I'm not claiming superiority, but you know, somehow here I am five years out of the lead seat.

Carey Nieuwhof: And I swear, this is true. Jeff and I have talked about it. I've never yet had one person say it was better when you led it, or, or I wish, I wish you were still leading it. Nobody's said it! On the one point your ego is crushed, right - you're like, what? Does anybody remember me? On the other hand, you're like sheesh, that's what is supposed to happen, right? Like if your eight year-olds dependent on you that's a good thing - but if your 38 year old is going, Dad, I need some money to get me through the weekend, there's an issue there. I think a lot of us who start things and a lot of us who, even, maybe we didn't start it, but we got really successful. There's an ego play there. And so, you know, as you've, you've said quality team-based decisions, I had to build a team that was going to outlive me.

Carey Nieuwhof: And because I really believe in the mission of the church, I want our church to be around 30 years from now in whatever form it's going to be in. But you know, Jeff and I have talked about, well, great. Now you're in the role - he's only been in it five years - but who's 20 years younger than you? Who's 15 years younger than you? We're in a series of conversations right now where we're exactly trying to answer that question. And he's not on his way out the



door, but you know, if you don't have that bench, if you don't have succession and I'll close the rant on this, because it's really close to my heart, I've seen so many, so many leaders get it wrong. And what God has done in our midst was so special. I'm like, I can't screw this up. I can't screw this up.

Carey Nieuwhof: Plus I knew, and you you've, you've talked about this lesson in your books, but I'd done it for 20 years. And I was getting tired of the things that should energize me. I was getting tired of meetings. I was like, so what's next? More, I didn't have a clear vision of the future. And I went, Oh, that smells like death. A decade from now. I can't, I can't, I can't be leading this. You gotta have white hot passion and vision. I think it was a call shift in my own life. I didn't realize at the time, and the church was strong. It was the biggest it had ever been. We had the most money in the bank we'd ever had. We were growing double digits the year I handed it off. And normally what happens in that cycle is a leader goes, Oh, I've got it.

Carey Nieuwhof: And then, you know, they kind of plateau and then you move into Treadmill and then into decline. And then it's like, okay, here you take this. Well, it's like watching Brett Farve play, right. It's like two seasons too long, man. Like, you should have gone when you were on top. And I didn't want to go when I was on top. I wanted to go when the church was on top so that he had, because I know normally what happens is a successor takes a hit for a couple of years. It's like maybe the finances drop and it didn't happen in Jeff's case. The church has grown every year since he took over. It's bigger and better than when I let it, but I just thought he needs some slack just in case something happens. And I think something like 95% of all businesses or it's in the nineties, die with their founder. And, the real question for me was, you know, not just can the church run without you, or it was can the church grow without you. So the real test of succession is can your successor not just run it? Can your successor grow it? And the answer is yes, he's done an amazing job. So I get to sit in the corner and cheer and, you know, help and encourage and support.

Les McKeown: I wanted to ask specifically about that. When we had Jeff on the podcast, I asked him to talk about the success of that handover, one of the things that he gave you credit for was getting out of the way, being available, but not messing with stuff. And a lot of people who attempt a transition or succession, that's where they fall down on. How hard did you find that?

Carey Nieuwhof: It was really weird for first of all, Yes. I would say this has gone incredibly well, but I have to look at the internal battle, which is that Jeff's running things in a way that I would not normally run them. In which case, in many cases, I'm like, wow, that's way better. But every once in a while, I'm like, Oh, what about this? And then one of two things happen. Either I say nothing. And the further I get away from the succession, the more important it is for me to shut my mouth, talk to my wife, say a prayer, walk away, go for a run, go for a ride. Just shut up. That's really because I've seen so many founders just nitpick their successors even to the point that they leave. And it's just it's disastrous. So we made a commitment that I would never speak ill of him publicly or privately to another person, you know, spouses accepted.



Carey Nieuwhof: Okay. If he's got to vent to Leslie and he made the reciprocal covenant. He's not like, Oh, well, now that I've got it, man, I'll diss Carey around the church. So we made that commitment and then privately, once in a while, I'll see some things. So if I'm not going to be quiet about it and I think it could be helpful, I usually wait for him to ask me questions, and sometimes he asks me questions. At the beginning he asked me a million. Sometimes he doesn't, and then I'll say, Hey, do I have permission to offer feedback? And I'll just ask him, do I have permission? He's never said no - he has permission to say no. And I'll say - and sometimes it's really small, like, did you see the scratch on the wall when you walk in by the foyer? because stuff like that really bothers me. It's like, Oh, I'll get that repainted. Or we'll get that repainted. Or it's not a big deal or whatever. Or sometimes I just need permission to get it off my chest. And then it's up to him. He does with it what he wants and then the issue is dead and buried. So, and so that's what we do it.

Les McKeown: The way in which that was handled, then allowed you to turn your focus, to Carey Nieuwhof Communications that you now run. Tell the folks a little bit about what that is, what it does, you know, what's your footprint, where do you show up and what do you do when you show up?

Carey Nieuwhof: You mean in the company or at the church now?

Les McKeown: In the company

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh, in the company. Yeah. By the way, that is a really good succession tip from the limited study I've done on succession. Two reasons that doesn't go well: One, financially I need the money. So I'm going to keep meddling, or please invent a job for me. And I've still been the teaching guy up until this year. But you know, my salary is a fraction of what it used to be, which is, which is fine. But the other thing, honestly, Les, is all your best days are behind you. And, you know, I left when I was 50 - I'm 55 now. So when I was 50 and I stepped out, I'm like, boy, there's a lot of life on the other side of 50. Right. And so if the biggest thing you become is almost like the homeowners association, will you just complain about everything 'cause you got nothing to do all day. So you just make city council's life miserable.

Carey Nieuwhof: And that's what a lot of guys do. It's like, I'm just going to go back and meddle cause I got nothing else to do. So, you know, I do a number of things. I do a leadership podcast. I actually host two podcasts now, I offer courses to leaders. So we've got a half dozen courses out in the market. By the time this airs - I used to speak and travel a lot - now we pivoted to a hundred percent digital in light of COVID and now my team has grown and it used to be me and an assistant, but now I've got a staff of six that I lead and basically we exist to help people thrive in life and leadership, and we produce resources that can help people do that. I still blog. We get a lot of traffic. I think these days, the content that I produce gets access to about a million and a half times a month.



Carey Nieuwhof: So it's got like a global impact, mostly American, but that's the blog, the podcast and emails that are actually read. I send a daily email to people, just a little leadership nugget every day. And so that keeps me busy. So I'm not like, I don't want to say I don't have time to go and meddle, but when you have a focus and a positive future, and that doesn't have to be another job, this actually got way bigger than I thought it would. Like I thought, Oh, maybe I'll do a bit of speaking in this. And there'll be like, now all of

Carey Nieuwhof: A sudden it's like, okay, well now what do I do. It's like, I guess it's going to be, it's going to keep me pretty busy. So it's, it's got me a pretty busy and I'm loving it. I feel like, you know, in the same way I think I felt called - if I want to interpret this theologically - called to go to law school, to meet my wife. That's the best thing that came out of law school. And then really two decades of ministry was fantastic. But I feel like this calling to help leaders and equip leaders is sort of the next season of my life and between books, the blog podcast courses speaking, if it comes back that that's going to keep me sprinting for a little while and I'm, I'm loving it. I'm loving it every bit, as much as I did my brief time in law or that first decade and a half of ministry.

Les McKeown: You know, that sense of excitement and fulfillment that you have comes across a lot in all that you do. And for anybody, whether you're in the for-profit, church, faith based world or not, I can thoroughly recommend all of Carey's materials. He does something which I believe to be a hundred percent true, which is he talks truth. And therefore the truth that he speaks is translatable into any environment, but you've been specifically focused on the church world. And, I remarked to you just as we were getting into the, preamble here to our discussion that I've been particularly struck by the directness of what you've been sharing on your blog into the church world, to church leaders in the last four to six weeks in terms of, as it seems to me, if I may paraphrase on your behalf, forgive me - trying to give many church leaders a wake up call about the reality of not just what's been going on and is going on now because of COVID, and the potential impact of that down the road. And I want to segue into the wider leadership impact of COVID as you see it, not just in the church world.

So Carey, summarize, if you can just, you know, the top four or five things that you've seen, that you're fearful that some church leaders are just either in denial or they're not getting?

Carey Nieuwhof: I think there's a pile of denial going on right now, and I hope I'm wrong. So I think I would start with this question, is this an interruption or a disruption? And I mean, we're recording this in August of 2020, if you want to timestamp it. And I think a lot of people thought, Oh, we'll be back to normal. Summer is going to take the virus away. The fall will be normal. It's not normal in the least. And you know, a lot of my friends who do what I do, who are speaking, I was talking to one yesterday. He's like, yeah, we're probably not in planes until summer of 2021. Now people are starting talking about 2022 and you can look at that. You can say, okay, so it's probably a disruption rather than an interruption because a crisis is an accelerator. but I also



think that there's a temptation to call this a medical crisis. And it is a medical crisis. People are dying, people are infected millions, you know, hundreds

Carey Nieuwhof: Of thousands deaths, et cetera, it's a medical crisis, but I also think it's a cultural crisis. And if you look at church attendance patterns, from the Barna group, over the last 20 years, it is pretty easy. It's down and to the left in every age demographic. And what's happened is we haven't had access to our buildings in churches that are reopening in the same way, restaurants and other businesses that are reopening are discovering that we used to base the whole model on packing the room out or getting as many people as we can in. And first of all right now, that's not possible. And number two, even if it is possible, let's assume there's a vaccine minutes from now. Everybody's fine. Coronavirus has gone. I think the shift is so deep because we have been moving to a digital economy anyway, and a digital reality anyway.

Carey Nieuwhof: and we've all adapted that people are gonna say, you know what Church went from five hours on a Sunday or three hours on a Sunday to 42 minutes. That is a really hard switch to flip back. And, you know, in the restaurant business I've been thinking about it. We had an opportunity to eat indoors based on our zoning. I'm like, I don't know whether I'm comfortable with that, which is really interesting cause I'm a Daredevil and a risk taker. And you know, am I going to do takeout more often. Probably I'm going to eat at home more often. I think there are some real cultural shifts. I read recently - I don't know if this is Toronto or New York, but 20% of all office space or retail space is now vacant. Every CEO I know, you know, more of them, but they're all talking about downsizing the footprint of their offices and moving to more Zooming, you know, business travelers like myself saying, I'm going to cut that way back.

Carey Nieuwhof: Cause if I can do a Google meet or a zoom call, I'll do that. And so I think those are permanent shifts. And what I see a lot of leaders doing is everyone's trying to get back to normal. I'm like guys, normal died. It's dead. So I feel like I'm kind of banging the 'normal is dead' drum and I get beat up online for it every day. We've got this ad running for one of my courses. It's like, are you ready for the new normal? And for a season there every day, somebody would be like, there is no such thing as a new normal, no! Normal is not gone! And it's like, look, I know you want to believe that. But what if that's true? Right? It's just, it's hard. And we think we can control these things. And we really can't.

Carey Nieuwhof: And so I think we're at risk Les of, you know, being the CD sales person in the age of Spotify, or the mall owner in the age of Amazon or blockbuster in the age of Netflix and Hulu and Disney plus like I just, I think it's shifted and you know, even for my company, we tend to operate on margin. And so I got to tell my team like, we're, we're safe. we got a few months here in the bank, right? So nobody's getting laid off. And then we said, what do we do? And just pivoted to digital, and, we've served over 10,000 leaders through our crisis leadership course.

Carey Nieuwhof: And then we introduced a very low cost product that could help people or just like, we're just here to serve, like you can pivot. And you've got to imagine new things. And



so my future looks radically different than I thought it would. And that's okay. And I think, I think if you don't pivot, you face irrelevance. The way I define relevance is as the gap between how quickly things change and how quickly you change. And if things are changing faster than you are, you become irrelevant. So you look at most organizations, most businesses, they're not pivoting particularly well. And all the stuff that we called innovation in March, April, May wasn't really innovation. It was adaptation. It's like the restaurants closed, the church is closed. The store is closed. The businesses closed. The meetings are assumed that that wasn't innovation.

Carey Nieuwhof: It was like, how do we salvage this thing? And so we got it. The innovation hasn't started yet. It was triage. It was stopped the bleeding. And, and so now, if we're going into a long winter economically, I don't know where it's going to go, but you know, you've got to keep pivoting and innovating. And I think the innovation has just started. And I was, I was reminding myself of that the other day because we have a new course coming on board. So I have a freemium model. 99% of what I do is absolutely free. And the 1% that is charged for pays for everything else, a lot of online businesses use that model. And we see ourselves as a ministry as well as a business just to help people. But I got to tell you, like, I'm like, don't just fall into the course rut - start looking at other things. So we're looking at a number of other options that we're exploring for 2020 and 2021 and beyond.

Les McKeown: I don't know about you, Carey, but I always try to remind myself that it's very easy to be insightful about other people's businesses and industries, and just eating your own dog food in that regard is a challenge sometimes because I agree a hundred percent with you. I think the degree of behavioral change that has, is now baked in means that there is no going back. And interestingly, Jason Mitchell, who's one of the senior pastors at LCBC, one of the largest churches in Pennsylvania, super church. And he's in our Mastermind Group here at Predictable Success. And he was sharing with the rest of the Mastermind Group members that, that he just banned people from talking about 'going back' to anything. And his stance is, you know, we are an online church that may at some point in the future have face to face, building-centric activities, but we're not going back to being a building-centric church that happens to be online.

Carey Nieuwhof: I agree. I've got a post that hasn't been written yet. It's five things pastors are addicted to. And number one on the list is our buildings. And I realized that that's how I led, like, you know, it was like, wow, you got to come here. And that is like a cable TV approach. Like you and I are both old enough to remember if you want to watch Seinfeld or Friends or, you know, pick your poison. Even The Office in the early days. It's like, well, you better be there Thursday night at nine or you're going to miss it, right? And now like, that's irrelevant. You tell a 17-year-old that it's like, what do you mean you can't watch when you want - you have to be there at a certain hour. And church keeps operating that way.

Carey Nieuwhof: You know, we were renovating our house a couple of years ago and I remember it was just one of those moments. And the contractor said, Hey, the tap we're



installing is broken. Can you go to Toronto Which is about an hour away and pick it up. I'm like, okay. And traffic was bad. And I just remember looking at Google maps and it said, we're going to close at six. And the thought that hit me is like, what do you mean you're not open 24 hours a day? Which is stupid. Of course, it's a physical business. It's a warehouse I'm going to, to get this, you know, faucet or whatever it was. But I'm like, yeah, in my mind, we were 24 hour a day people and I was going to a retail location. So it's just, it's such a mindset shift. And the, and the other thing that's challenging particularly, and I love the people at LCBC.

Carey Nieuwhof: I've spoken there a couple of times at different conferences. And so this is not a reflection of them, but you know, when you're, when you're successful, success makes you conservative. Success is, Oh, I know how to do this. So I'm not going to change it because I don't want to mess it up. And so, you know, some people were very successful in the old economy, some people, and I think the people who were best at the way, things were, are the most motivated to bring them back to that place, even if it doesn't success, but then you become, even if it doesn't succeed, because then you become the buggy whip sales person in the era of the automobile, it's like probably don't have much of a future, nice little niche, enjoy it. But you're the tech industry suing the city in the lift. Like that's what you become.

Carey Nieuwhof: And so, yeah, I just, I see that. And I'm shocked to be honest with you about how prevalent that attitude appears to be in the church, community businesses, all the CEOs. I know they pivoted overnight in March. They were like, how do we get out of this lease? How do we downsize? How do we pivot to this? How do we do business differently? And church leaders are like, let's just go back. Let's just go back. And I'm like, guys, you can't go back. And if you do want to, go ahead. But I think you're going to get 30 to 50% of what you used to get in, and if you have the most important mission in the world, which I think the church does, is that good enough to me. It's not good enough.

Les McKeown: I'm a hundred percent in agreement with everything you've said. And I would add that a lot of businesses have done the same thing. They've essentially, you know, nobody could blame anybody for this that, you know, come March 13 in the U S timeframe, it was just triage, triage, triage for probably six weeks, just dirty fingernail work - the Munsch scream - but then, in the middle of it, and for the next period of time, a lot of, for profits and not for profits, they did pivot in the sense that they went to where the ball had moved to. So it's like watching six year olds play soccer, it's flock ball and people realize, okay, the ball has moved. So I'm going to pivot to where the ball is now. And that makes sense sorta in the short term as part of triage. But I think the point you're making, the way I've been expressing it to folks is if all you've done is pivot, then that's not a longterm solution. Cause you're gonna have to pivot again and again, because the ball is going to keep moving. And I'm so reminded by somebody that with your Canadian background, you'll remember a lot better than most people. Bobby Orr - a great ice hockey player. He said frequently when asked the secret of success, it's very simple. I skated to where the puck was going to be



Les McKeown: Innovation, right That's not pivoting that's innovation. And what we're talking about - those churches and not-for-profit leaders who have got the vision to skate to where the puck is going to be, not pivot to where the ball is.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's so accurate. And that's hard to know, but you know, I'm betting a few big things. Number one, life's going to be way more digital. And, there's also evidence. I mean, Stanford's done a study. And then in real time, like big organizations internationally are offering online and they're discovering that relationships can't fully exist online, but they can be supplemented way more than anybody thought online. And sometimes people are more truthful online than they are in person, which is really interesting. they, you know, I'm betting online as a big part of the future. in the same way, there was a big pivot in the nineties and early two thousands in evangelical churches from Sunday school.

Carey Nieuwhof: So, you know, if you grew up in old fashioned church, Sunday school wasn't just for kids, it was for grownups and you would end up going to, you know, church in the morning, you do a Sunday school class where they taught you a book of the Bible and then you go to worship. So it was like a morning deal. And then the last generation boomers came along and they said, well, why don't we just go to small groups? And then we don't have to keep building square footage because we can leverage your home and my home and all these homes and, you know, small groups scales because if you've got 10 or fewer people meeting in your living room or back porch, you can do 10 of those without spending a dollar. So that kind of works, but we never got over it for the big events. And I think what, this is what we're now starting to see like LCBC and a fresh church friend, Ingersoll King's church in Eastern Canada are saying, and JD Greer has talked about this at his church - How do we actually become a church of Home groups, like basically the church meets in homes, the church meets in regional centers and we are there to support you. If you ever go to Chick-fil-A's headquarters, which I've been, they don't call it headquarters. They call it, I think the support center. And they say, it's massive, but they say, no, we are not the be all and the end all - this is not HQ. We are here to serve the owner operators that are distributed all over the U S and increasingly around the world. And so they see themselves as a support. And I think, okay, that's a great model for church. Like if I was still in the leader's seat, I'd be like, what can we do to leverage small gatherings And when we, the last thing I did as a leader at Connexus, when I was still lead pastor was I finished up our broadcast location.

Carey Nieuwhof: And, you know, it was 10 years of zoning and you know how what goes on in cities. And so we ended up springing for a couple million dollars, which is basically what we could reasonably spend at the time, and ended up with 26,000 square feet. Wasn't big enough in my view, but like, you gotta, you gotta live in the real world, not in some fake world. And so it's only 350 seats. So we're now a church of 1500 people in our biggest auditorium is 350 seats, but you turn a few overflow locations, et cetera. Then, you know, you can figure that out. But as I toured people through the facility, so this was five years ago. I used to joke with them. I said, we



built a broadcast studio with a church attached because we really invested in cameras, staging lighting. So if you see us online, you'd think what is that?

Carey Nieuwhof: A 2000 seat auditorium? It's like, Nope, 350 seats. But I knew even in 2015 that the vast majority of people who would come into contact with our message would see it through the lens of a camera. And so we built that with that in mind. Well, you know, fast forward to 2020, and all of a sudden it's like, thank goodness we have this broadcast studio and we've been online for four years, but suddenly when that's the only thing, and I think that's a model for the future. You ever been to like a taping of Fallon or the Tonight Show or that kind of thing, there's a really small audience. It's striking when you go in, it's like, wow, how many people are here 200? Like, it's really small. I haven't seen Fallon. I saw Leno just before he retired in LA. And, you know, we went in for the Tonight Show taping.

Carey Nieuwhof: It's like, this is pretty small, but there are millions of people watching, you know, on TV or on now online. And I just think that's probably the future and will that, you know, in person might be more dispersed too. So it is about relationships, but I think that's all gonna morph. And the churches that get on it now are going to have, and the businesses that get on it now her say, you know, maybe take out, it's going to be 70% of what we do. Let's just assume it is like I had to pivot. So my company, when I had literally a year of speaking just wiped out overnight and everything with it, I just said to the team on the Monday after the Friday before when the world shut down, I'm like, we're a 100% digital company starting right now. Now I thought would come back in the summer... wrong!

Carey Nieuwhof: I thought, well, it'd be back in the fall... wrong! I think now maybe next year at some point... maybe wrong! It doesn't matter. We're a hundred percent digital company. So we, I can never get on an airplane again and we're just fine. We get to do, because our mission isn't to get on airplanes. Our mission is to help people thrive in leadership. And so you in life and leadership, so you got to just help people do that. Well, I can do that from my office. I can, I can do that with a microphone. I can do that with the keyboard. I can do that with books and we can do virtual events. So, you know, that's what we're going to do indefinitely until the world changes and the physical opens up. And if it's smart to do it strategically, then guess what I'll jump on an airplane again. But until then, I'm not waiting for that day.

Les McKeown: that's been, that last piece that you shared a great opportunity to segue into something I'd love to give the listeners a little bit more of an insight into which is just to have you share a little bit, - you teach leadership in a specific environment, the church world. Now you're running a for profit business. I mean, it may be based within the church environment, but it's a for profit business, like just about two thirds of the folks that are listening. What have you learned about yourself as a leader in that phase, this phase of your life? What have been the biggest challenges for you? So you had the law world and that was all about, you know, finding your spouse. So then you had the church, pastor, period. Running a business - where have you found yourself going "I really need to step up here. I'm behind the pace".



Carey Nieuwhof: It's interesting, you know, Les, because, first of all, just to clarify for the church listeners. It's like, what do you mean it's a for profit? Because normally the path is everybody starts a not-for-profit when you're not working for the church. The only difference in my mind between a for profit and a not for profit is for-profits pay taxes. And just like I've seen so many leaders screw up succession, I've seen so many faith people get into trouble with their not for profits, because "you shouldn't have done this". I'm like, I'm just going to pay my taxes and treat it like a ministry, but I'll just pay taxes. So I just pay taxes. That's it. So, that's why, but our first value is "serve first". Am I seeing our work as a ministry and a business? That's value number one in the company, because it is a business.

Carey Nieuwhof: Like if at the end of the day, if I can't meet payroll, everybody goes home. It's over. Right. But that's true in the church too. So actually surprisingly, you know, when I look at my brief time in law and then ministry, and now it's all the same challenges, it's just at a different scale. I'm always the lid. John Maxwell said very famously. If you're the leader, you're the lid. I was a lid at the church. It took us forever to break the thousand barrier. Why? Cause I couldn't release control. And, you know, I'm still the lid in my company and your coaching has been really super helpful. So, you know, now we're at the point where not everybody's a direct report to me. Hopefully it's not, you know, the genius part was a joke, but the genius with a thousand helpers - where it's one person generating everything - no, we've got a team now and we're growing,

Carey Nieuwhof: But I am the lid, and ambivalence as a leader is still there - Like, what is my vision as a leader? All those things are still the problem. And then what I'm trying to figure out right now, the church was super simple. It's like, this is not about me. I don't want this thing to die with me, and I don't want it to decline after me. So that was a no brainer. But the challenge for me now is how hard do I want to work at this now, because it was originally just a little hobby. That's become like a full time job and, and I've reframed it in the context of a calling.

Carey Nieuwhof: And if God gives me three more decades till I'm in my eighties, then this is what with his permission I would love to do. And I just finished - I've just had a great run of excellent books - I just finished five years after everyone else, Simon Sinek's Leaders Eat Last. And I love his understanding of leadership. Very similar if you read The Motive from Patrick Lencioni, that the primary responsibility for leaders is to serve. And so I was, you know, I'm 55. It's like a lot of my friends are finding beaches and retiring. And I'm like, is this what I want to do? Is this cause - running a company is work, right? Like it's work. It means you serve other people, you serve your audience. And so there was a little bit of a soul crisis in that, like, you know, which is because if you look at corporate America and even law, it's like, what's in it for me?

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, I'm not really wired that way, but this is a season of life where you could easily go. Yeah, what's in it for me? But my wife and I, as we prayed about it and we've dealt with



it, we're like we're diving in. We're just going to try to serve people. And you know, you have to stay profitable. Otherwise you got to close up shop or, you know, you can't do what you do anymore, but lay everybody off. But you know, we are going to do this for a long while. And once I had that resolved and that ambivalence was gone, I'm like this is going to be a fun ride. And it is a joy. And I've had that privilege most of my life to get up every day and say, I get to do this. And I feel like most days I get to do this and that's really cool, but it's all the same issues. Scale, delegation, vision, culture. I work really, hard at culture. That's probably the biggest change in the last decade is I did not pay attention in the first 10 or 15 years to culture. And then about with five years of church leadership left, I'm like, Oh, I gotta really pay attention to this. I'm working on my personal health, healthy leaders produce healthy teams. So going to counseling, staying healthy. And I say to my team all the time (and it's not a big team, it's like six, seven people, eight people, whatever) I'm like, you know what I just want this to be the best job you've ever had. You don't have to work here forever, but I want you to love coming to work. So we work really hard on culture. And you know, it's, it's kind of like gravity, it just pulls you down. Like if you're not working on culture, making it better, it naturally drifts toxic. So it's, it's having those values highly tuned. It's living them out, revisiting them weekly, revisiting the mission and just keeping people motivated because nobody really wants to work for me, but maybe they would love to try to help people thrive in life and leadership. And if they want to do that, boy, we could have an exciting future together.

Les McKeown: Well, it's been a fantastic journey (that sounds like I've just given your eulogy!) But it's been a fantastic journey that you and I have had, you know, we've been blessed to sort of just meet in passing on many occasions. We've met very deliberately on many occasions. And I had the unique, as you mentioned a moment ago, the unique opportunity to spend six months in detail with you recently just working through a lot of those challenges that you just shared and, you know, that commitment that you have to make your place a place that your people want to be, is a North star. There's no doubt about it. It informs everything that you do. And as we've shared, that's going to be challenged as you grow, the more you grow, the more pressures that come to dilute that, to compromise, to give parts of it away. And it's been marvelous watching you steel your spine to keep hold of that at all costs.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's another big superpower of the last decade is I've gotten a lot better at saying no, and it's still hard. I said no a couple of times to friends, I'm on book deadline. It's like, Hey, cause everybody just wants 30 minutes, right? Can I have 30 minutes? Can you do one talk? Can you do this one thing? I've learned to affirm the person and affirm the relationship and say, Hey, I'd love to right now, but I'm on book deadline or my plate's full, or I just can't do it. And that allows me to be a better husband, to be a better dad, to be a better boss, to be a better leader. And if my team's happy and healthy, and if my family's happy and healthy, then chances are the readers or listeners, the customers, the leaders we serve will be happy because when they interact with the team... - like if you have a nasty flight attendant, probably he or she had a bad boss, or there's a toxic culture.



Carey Nieuwhof: But if you've got happy flight attendants, you got happy servers at this restaurant, you've got a motivated chef when you go out to eat and they're bringing their best, like, you know that as a client and you knew that in the congregation. That was one of the things people always said, how do you do that - so we had 700 volunteers I think. And how do you motivate them all while they're healthy I promise you that people go to your church. You're going to be healthy, but that's a lot of work to motivate those volunteers, to get them, you know, in that place where they really want to lean in. And so I'm saying no to a lot. And like you there's opportunities that show up every few hours and just like, okay, I'm going to stay focused. I know my lane and this is what I'm called to do. but that's super, super hard.

Les McKeown: Well, we're blessed that you didn't say no to us. Thank you for coming along and sharing with the Predictable Success tribe.

Carey Nieuwhof: I couldn't say no to you Les, are you kidding me? Thank you - I'm so grateful for you.

Les McKeown: Pleasure. Thank you. And I hope you'll come back in a couple of years and tell us what the journey has been like.

Carey Nieuwhof: Hey, can I make an offer to your listeners for the free course? So I'm not selling you anything, but if you want to take the crisis leadership course, it's called How to Lead Through Crisis. It's sort of everything I've learned about the tough seasons in life plus best gleanings from others. It's absolutely free. We've had, I think 11, 12,000 leaders go through it so far. And you can find that by texting crisis to 33777 - text crisis to three, three, seven, seven, seven. It's absolutely free - or go to HowtoLeadThroughCrisis.com.

Les McKeown: and we'll put all of those details right below wherever it is that you're hearing this. And I strongly recommend that you go get it. I took it, I learned a lot and you all should get to hear Carey's cool Canadian accent.

Les McKeown: All right, Carey. Thank you again.

Carey Nieuwhof: Thank you, Les. I'm so grateful for you.

Les McKeown: You and I will talk again very soon. I will have you back in the podcast in a couple of years and hear how you've been getting along. Thanks.