

Carey Nieuwhof:

Welcome to Leaders Circle. Wow. This is quite a challenging subject. So a number of you are asking, how do you lead with vision when you can't see ahead? And that is a great question. I mean, we've all been driving in the fog before, right? And you ever been driving in the fog before, when even your fog lights don't work? Uh-huh (affirmative). What do you do? Well, what you do, if it's really bad, is you pull over to the side of the road and you just kind of wait.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Unfortunately, as leaders, that's not really an option. Like Sunday's coming, Sunday's coming, you got your next quarter. Whatever you're leading, you've got a future ahead and you've got to lead people with vision. So I want to walk you through a few principles knowing that this is thinking in pencil, but a few principles that have really helped me lead with vision when you can't see ahead.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So point number one is, there's three questions that always show up in leadership. What, how, and why? And so that leads us to the first principle, which is simply this, focus on why twice as much as you focus on what and how. So in more certain times, you have an idea about how, how is going to work. It's like, well, this is how we're going to do it. Here's our plan. Here's when we launch it, here's what we're going to do. Here's how much it's going to cost, et cetera.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And the problem of course, leading with vision is, you don't really know any of the what and how ahead. You don't really know. You don't know when schools are going to reopen fully. You don't know when the virus is going to go away. You don't know when culture is going to go back to normal. You don't know what the new normal is. You don't know how many people are going to come back to church. How many people are going to come back to your store? How many people are going to give? Is it going to get worse before it gets better? So all that clarity that we sort of have in more stable times, is gone. It's just out the window.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So that leaves you with probably the most important thing. And I always believe, even in normal times, the most important thing you can do as a leader, when it comes to vision, is lead with why. But you're going to have to lean doubly hard on why in uncertain times. And that'll get you through change, in the best of times. That'll get you through crisis. But I think back to when I started leading three little churches, when I started 25 years ago. And some of you may know that story, some of you may not. I'll give you the thumbnail version.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But we came into these three historic churches. They were very small, six, 14, 23 average attendance. I'd do the circuit on Sunday morning. And they were small and they were in historic 100 year old buildings. And by the grace of God, we started to grow almost right away. Within five years, we had outgrown the facilities. So I was proposing that we actually sell all three historic buildings, move to an elementary school, raise some money and move into a new building. Which is ultimately what we did. We built our own building and everything.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But imagine how hard that is. I'm like, barely 30, trying to convince people to sell these buildings that their great grandparents built and that their families have been in for years. That was not easy. Not everybody stood up and applauded, okay? So that was a crisis that we created, so to speak. But the way we got through that and we left the buildings, is I just kept focusing on why. Because people in a congregational meeting or meeting people want to know, well, what are we going to do and how much it's going to cost? Because the future is so uncertain.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I'm just like, look, we kind of knew how bad it was prior to this. We didn't have a lot of people, and you knew the writing was on the wall. Like, if we didn't turn this around ... When you have six people at your church, if you don't turn it around fast, you're not going to be open for very long. All right. So we kind of knew that's where we came from. And I know you guys, you want to create a church that your kids and grandkids want to come to. And look at this community that we're in, don't we want to reach them? And that's why we're doing what we're doing, doing. And they're like, Oh yeah, right. And that's what gave us a 75% vote.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And this is still, like the grace of God all over this, 75% vote in favor of selling the buildings. And we eventually amalgamated the three churches, moved into an elementary school, and then opened up a brand new facility that we built together. And saw the church grow so many times over, multiple times over, we grew to about 800 in the first decade. And that was incredible to see, but it was the why that got us through.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And you know, that's the same motivation for weight loss. If you want to drop a few pounds, it's not like, well just eat fewer calories. It's like, well, what's your why? Well, my why is, I want to feel good about myself or I want to feel healthier. Or your why is, the doctor says my blood pressure is through the roof and my cholesterol levels are bad. Oh, yeah. See, people can put up with almost any what if they know the why.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Now the good news is, as leaders, you have the best why in the world. The best why in the world is the gospel. We want to reach a city. We want to reach our community. We want to reach people. We want to reach your kids and grandkids. So that becomes your best thing and your job, because everyone, look at your social media feed. Everybody is focused on what and how, and this is fake, or this is real, or I think, or I think. And so your job is to come up in the middle and just talk about why. And you know, it's kind of like vision itself, right? If you're sick and tired of talking about the vision, you've just gotten started.

Carey Nieuwhof:

If you're sick and tired of talking about why you're like, I reminded you why yesterday? It's like, no, your job is everyday, lead with why. So even in your emails, you can say things like, man, I'm so glad that we have an opportunity to do this together in a moment like this. Like to lead people into a relationship with Jesus. Or if you're not leading in a church in Leader Circle, to do whatever you're doing.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And just remind people over and over again, remind yourself, remind your staff, remind your team, but lead with vision. Talk about it two times as often as you talk about what or how. Probably in a crisis, it's more like 10 times. And that will just keep everybody on the same page. Why are you doing what you're doing? So that's what you do, is you refocus on the mission and you lead with why.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Second thing, is clarify what is mission, and what is method. All right? Because in leadership, you're always defining the method from the mission. So some of you led in-person groups that met in a facility that isn't open right now. Well, in the initial stages of Corona virus, nobody could meet with anybody, but it's like, okay, we'll do zoom. But maybe you used to meet in a facility, but now you're meeting in homes. Or you're meeting in a restaurant. Or you're meeting in a patio or a backyard or whatever.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You see, the method changed, but the mission is the same. Your mission is to connect people. Your mission is to help people grow. Your mission is to serve the poor. So the method changed. Now you need masks or you've got a drive by thing, but the mission stays the same. And the problem in most organizations and the longer an organization has been around, the more the methods become sacred. And so your methods become really hallowed ground. Well, this is the way we've always done it. This is the way we always do church. And so your job as a leader ... I mean, you can do this even to the point of writing down on a piece of paper, what are the methods? What are the mission?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Now, let's pull the camera back a little bit and look at culture. History over the last 15 years is littered with examples of organizations that forgot the mission and focused on the method. Kodak is a great poster child example of that. Kodak actually invented the first digital camera. And they went bankrupt in 2012, why? Because they bet the future, not on digital photography, but on film. Adam Grant, in one of his books, talks about the story of Kodak. And there was an active debate a number of years ago, probably in the mid 2000s if I date it right, where they were debating whether or not they were going to bet the future on digital or print.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And Kodak said, come on, we're Kodak. We print the best quality photo paper in the business, and people are always going to want to print their photos. Now that turned out to be a fatal mistake. And you know what killed Kodak? It wasn't digital cameras, it was Instagram, because Instagram changed how we share photos. If you talked to 2005 you and said, one day you're not going to print your photos, you're just going to look at them on your phone. You'd be like, what?

Carey Nieuwhof:

But Instagram changed that, because they made photo-sharing easily. And if you look at your phone today, you probably even, haven't got your photos cataloged and you haven't printed some in years, right? Every once in a while, when you redo that wall thing you've got, that montage of family photos, you print those. That's about it. All right. So Kodak kind of lost the mission to the method.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Think about news, right? So newspapers were the method, but news is the mission. And you have to ask yourself, are we in the newspaper business, or are we in the news business? Clothing is the mission, a store is the method. So are we in the job of clothing people, or are we in the mission of opening retail stores? If you think your mission is to open retail stores, well, you've got a wobbly future. If your mission is to clothe people, and your method can be the internet, not just a store, you probably have a vibrant future ahead of you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

A couple of other things. Shopping is the mission, the mall was the method. If you're into shopping, people are going to shop as long as there are people and we're in this culture, right? The mall is the method. It's a method that worked. It doesn't work very much. Transportation is the mission, taxis are the method. So the taxi industry has taken a big hit as ride share programs have taken off. But if you're really in the transportation business ... And think about that a century and a half ago, right? Horse and buggy makers versus Model T and the first prototypes of cars. It's like, are we in the transportation business, or the horse and buggy business? Those are the questions you have to ask.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So what is your method and what is your mission? So for a long, long time, church has been housed in a facility. Well, is your mission to gather people in a facility, or is your mission to lead people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ? And to create a church, in our case, that non-church people love to attend. What is your mission? So you've got to really clarify that. And remember, the mission is sacred, the methods are temporary. The mission is eternal, the methods are not. And organizations that are willing to change their methods, preserve the mission, and new methods give the mission new life. So that's the second principle.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay. Principle number three is simply this, connect the cultural dots. One of the best things you can be doing right now is watching what's happening in culture. Now I know that everything is changing all the time, okay? And you're like, I don't really know what's happening in culture right now. But there are clues. There are clues. And there have been some major shifts that have happened so far since the crisis started to unfold. So what are some of the cultural dots?

Carey Nieuwhof:

One is, I am watching the home as an emergence of a central hub. So think about everything that shifted to the family home condo, apartment, whatever that is. In March 2020, work shifted home, school shifted home. Fitness, if you're into fitness shifted home, because that was closed. What else? Shopping shifted home and entertainment shifted home. So for months and months and months, all those things shifted to the home. And on a temporary basis, I think perhaps a more permanent basis, church shifted home too.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Now, I think some of those things will swing back, right? Will all the malls die? No, all the malls are not going to die, but the malls might be reconfigured. Will every gym and restaurant disappear? No, not every gym and restaurant would disappear. But if I was a restaurateur right now, my guess is people may not return to in-person dining at levels they did before. What can I do to bolster takeout, because

people still need food. And now that people are mobilized again, will take out become a bigger part of my future?

Carey Nieuwhof:

But if you think about the home as a hub, all those things moving home. When is school going to be normal again? I don't know, but there are probably some parents who are making permanent shifts to saying, we're going to take a more active role in our kids' education. And I think this will probably ... And I could be wrong. I could totally be wrong, but here's what I'm thinking.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I'm thinking that this is going to impact home architecture over the next few years. That if you were building a home today and you're sitting down with your architect today, you might change how many bedrooms you have, how many offices you build. You might create more common space so the kids can work over here on their homework. You can work over there at work.

Carey Nieuwhof:

If you were designing a house today, you might design it very differently. Where's the home gym? Are we going to do a converted garage or a basement, or are we going to build a room out? Now again, I realize that's sort of a privileged position to talk about, but there are people who are designing homes right now who are having those conversations with architects.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And so then the question is, is your model going to be, no, to connect with Jesus you have to come to a building. No, to buy clothes, you have to come to a building. No, to work out, you have to come to a building. Or do you think you'll be able to get behind people in their homes, in their communities, in the city/.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Now, when it comes to church leadership, which is where a lot of you are focused, you have the opportunity to come alongside people in their neighborhood, because here's what's true, right? If they're in their neighborhood, they are interacting with their neighbors. If they're at work, they're interacting with people at work. So what if instead of the church becoming the destination, it actually becomes the place where you can start equipping people because the ultimate destination is home.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Now, theologically, you may have already always believed that the ultimate destination is home. But behaviorally, when we lost access to our building, we acted as though we lost access to ministry. So I think if the home becomes the hub ... And some of those things will swing back. But I think when you look, three, four years down the road, at the way people use their home then compared to 2019, you'll see some key shifts. And are you going to be on the front end of that or the backend of that, trying to fill up your building in the future. So those are some things that I would be looking at.

Carey Nieuwhof:

A couple of final points, just before we wrap up in this month's Leaders Circle. I would see constraint as your friend. Yes, it's kind of frustrating. You don't have the money you want, you don't have the

freedom you want. You don't have the ability you want. You can't gather the way you want. You can't go out the way you want. But what if those became an opportunity?

Carey Nieuwhof:

One of the things that happened to me, personally, was I had a year of speaking on the calendar. And it just disappeared overnight, right? Countries shut down, borders, shut down, airlines stopped flying. It's like, well, that's out the window. And it looks like it's out of the window indefinitely for a while. So what do you do? Well, you can just rail against that, spend all your time trying to resurrect your speaking career. Or you can do what I'm doing today, and get in front of a camera and a microphone and have a conversation with people.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And you can still connect with people. So we pivoted, literally the week after coronavirus kind of shut down the world, to become a 100% digital company. I think that would be a great move for churches as well. Not saying you don't gather, but what if you just went ahead on the assumption that you couldn't gather or gathering was going to be disrupted for a while? Then you've got a model that might actually withstand a few storms.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And it turned out for us, that was a really, really good pivot. We're able to do other things now because I'm not on the road all the time. Airports are very inefficient and airplanes are not always that comfortable. And so I'm at a place now where I get to do more for leaders as a result of the constraints, and even the financial constraints that that put on me, because I was motivated to try to figure out another way to make it all work.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So when you think about, what does this make possible? That is a much better way of looking at what I can't do, focus on what you can do. One of my favorite leadership quotes of all time, I quote it all the time, Henry Ford, who said, "Whether you think you can or think you can't, you're right." And he's right. Whether you think you can, or you think you can't, you're right. And so don't focus on what you can't do, start to focus on what you can do. And I think you will see opportunities expand.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Finally, and this is the final thought for this month, you're probably going to have to rethink this every 30, 60, 90 days. With things as wobbly as they are right now, we don't know when normal is coming, what normal looks like, what the new world will be. But having an exercise like this, where you rethink things, you're like, are we really focused on the mission? Are we challenging the methods? Are we putting things on the table? How do we connect the cultural dots? What's changing right now? Because this conversation is going to change over the next few months. And if you do that, man, I think great things will happen.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And so I hope this is incredibly helpful to you. Thanks so much for joining us. And there's some application guides below, some questions, some exercises to work through. I really hope it helps.