

## Relational Advice for Leaders

Excerpts from a podcast, [Carey Nieuwhof and John Townsend CNLP 286](#)

From *People Fuel* by John Townsend

**We need to prioritize who we spend our time with. We have lots of people wanting to relate to us.**

Leaders experience a sense of being overwhelmed and drained. Leaders are the flame and people are like moths who keep coming to them because that's what people do. Leaders have to give up the good (new initiatives, coffee, a new project) because it's not the great, and it can keep you from accomplishing your Mission. You've got to prune out the good, to focus on the great.

**We need to be able to say, No.**

**Why is it so hard to say, "No," and how do you do it?**

Three reasons.

**One** is because **we don't want to lose a relationship and disappoint someone.** If I had this great alliance with somebody, and if I say no to their request for more time, more resource, more energy, more focus, more money, then they might pull away from me, and I need that relationship, which means I've got to have more relationships to cover them up and replace them.

The **second** one is that **we don't want conflict, because we don't want to hurt people's feelings, and we don't want to get them upset with us.** That's when you've got to work on how do you handle people who are disgruntled and can't take a no? Because mature people should take a no, but a lot of people can't take a no.

The **third** is **we don't want to wound people.** We don't want to make them lose self-esteem, especially if it's our direct reports or one of our key people. We don't want to bust their bubble. So we've got to find ways just to have boundaries with them and say, "I'm not available then," or whatever, in ways that still show value.

There's a way to tell somebody no, without worrying about their self-esteem, and caring about them, that you can be very direct and very gracious and get things done.

Well, one thing is we know that people have a, what's called in my world, the clinical psychology world, **a persecutory judge.** The persecutory judge says, **"They're after you. They don't like you. Carey's mad at me. Why is he picking on me and nobody else?"** You've **got to defeat that,** or they can't hear what you have to say, when you correct them or disappoint them or whatever.

What you've got to do is you've got to come up with affirmations and say, **"By the way, we're going to talk about some disruptive stuff. It's positive disruption. Before I get into the content issue, you know how important you are to us, and to me, and on the team. I don't know what we'd do without you, and I love where we're going, so but I want to solve this wrinkle."** You've heard about the whole **confrontation sandwich,** right?

Then the persecutory judge is located in the amygdala, the fight or flight. It calms down and goes, “Oh, you're not getting beat up. You're not getting fired. They're not judging you. They like you. I can hear what Carey has to say now.”

ROLE PLAY- How to say No while preserving the person's persecutory judge:

**John Townsend: So glad to hear from you Carey. I have often wanted to get to where you are, and what an opportunity. I just checked my schedule. Oh my gosh, I am slammed for the week. I feel so horrible about this.**

**Carey Nieuwhof:** Oh, yeah, no, that's okay, John. What you don't understand is I came to California just to meet with you. I know I didn't tell you, but I've got a whole week, so I mean, if you can squeeze me in anywhere, I really don't have a lot going on, and whatever I have, I can move it. It would be the highlight of my life.

**John Townsend:** Oh my gosh, I really appreciate that, and actually I've been wanting to meet you for a long time, as well, face-to-face. We know each other by our stuff, but I, unfortunately I'm... You know what I'm doing right now? I'm looking at my calendar, as we're talking, Carey, and **there is nothing I can move**. Unfortunately, I've got almost overdone stuff, and my assistant is... She pulled her hair out this morning. She literally pulled it... She has no hair now, because of my schedule.

John Townsend: **The problem is, for me to move something, then... I'm one of those stupid integrity guys. For me to move somebody that has really committed for six months to be with me, I would really not show respect for them. Gosh, I'm sorry, Carey.** Is there some way that we can pencil out at another time, man? I'd love to talk to you on the phone tomorrow about this. We can pencil out when I can see you, and maybe we can meet halfway in Kansas or something. Is that a possibility?

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh, you know what, John? As disappointed as I am, that would be great. Thank you.

I don't have to justify it. Five words that will change your life are: **That doesn't work for me**. It doesn't feel as mean as just no. It feels connected, and it feels respectful. “That doesn't work for me” – these five words will change your life. OR for that person you are never going to meet with: three magic words “I'm not available **for the foreseeable future.**” And then offer them another resource instead of you to get what they are looking for.

## HOW DO WE DEAL WITH THE LOUD, NEGATIVE SELF TALK IN OUR HEADS?

High-performing leaders have worse negative self-talk than other people, which seems counterintuitive. In other words, the higher you go, the louder the negative voice in your head happens to be.

### 1. Modify the Internal Judge with Warm and Accurate Self Talk:

We develop a harsh inner critic, a mean judge in our head who would say stuff like, “It's all on you,” or, “Everybody's going to be disappointed,” or, “You might not qualify,” and this voice rose

them to high levels. The problem is, it doesn't work long-term. Sooner or later, you just give up, and you're going to decide, I'm so tired of beating myself up and saying these awful things to myself. You have to do what we call, when I take teams and through businesses and stuff like that, **modifying the internal judge. You have to modify the judge, so instead of saying, "You're such a screw-up. Everybody's disappointed. You'll never make it," to be two things. It has to be warm, and it has to be accurate.**

John Townsend: That internal judge, that self-monitoring part of myself, has to be warm and accurate, so I come away from the meeting, and I'm driving home, and instead of saying, "Oh my gosh, you just sucked. You're the worst," I've trained the judge to say, **"You did your best. You could've done better, and I think you could've talked less about your own story, maybe other people's stories. You didn't list that well, but you're learning from that."** Then I go, okay. I didn't feel great, but I make some notes, and I change.

John Townsend: **As long as you train your judge to be warm, not mean, and accurate, like on target, what the correction is, then you stop being that way.** What got you there, which is driving yourself too hard, it will not... I can tell you this. It will not take you to that next level of scale. You've got to be nicer to yourself.

## 2. **Modify the Internal Judge by rewiring your brain by internalizing what your real Empathetic Friends say to you**

You can't do it just by talking to yourself. That's helpful. Talking to yourself is helpful, but where the real transformational change is, is in relationship, meaning **I take my judge to somebody that's safe, that I trust, that cares about me and is honest**, and all those good things, and I say, "I just did the presentation. I think it was the worst in the world. I'm just beating myself up, and I just feel like I let everybody down." That person in my life, outside my skin, says to me, "Yeah, I saw the video. You weren't your top in your game. Probably you were stressed, but **you're okay with me, and I'll help you, so what can we do to make it better? You and I are okay. I'm not judging you at all.**

All of a sudden, it's **called internalization**. I internalize their **eye contact, and their warmth, and the fact that they're on my team and they care about me, and the judge calms down**. We found out that when we have empathic contact from other people, truthful but empathic, all of a sudden, the actual wiring of our brain changes. This was the miracle of neuroscience, Carey, for leadership, is that **we can actually change the neuron structure by healthy relational conversations**. We found out that when people have a great relational conversation with an empathic, caring, truthful, honest person, that as they hear it, and have a different new experience of, oh, you don't think I'm the worst person in the world, that the actual ways that we talk to ourselves changes. It's a little bit like saying the app in my smartphone can change the operating system. It really is that profound.

John Townsend: Everybody's going crazy about it, because we're finding out you can... People used to say, "Well, my brain is always the way my brain is." Nope, **you can change your brain by the right conversation with the right people. It's like magic.**

## RELATIONSHIPS WE NEED

**Isolation and loneliness is a growing issue.** You talk about in *People Fuel* that a lot of leaders' relational circle boils down to God, myself, and Max. We have lots of outflow – where we pour into people's lives, but almost no “inflow” where other's fuel us.

We know about bio nutrients. There are also **relationship nutrients**. There's 22 in four categories, that we give each other through a conversation, that my brain gives it to your brain, and your brain gives it to my brain.

### Why do we get isolated?

Because you know the old saying, “Leadership is lonely.” That's got a basis in reality. How does that happen? John Townsend: Well, there are a few reasons. When you study leadership on a performance and a research level, you find out a few dynamics are happening.

1. One is **self sufficiency**, that somehow in their training, either in family of origin with mom and dad, or in school, or in their leadership training, or whatever, they were taught that you've got to have all the answers and be the strong one. Nothing could be further from the truth. All the research points the other way, that the Superman, Captain America, Wonder Woman leader is not a leader people follow, because they can't identify with them, so one is self-sufficiency.
2. John Townsend: Another is **bad experiences with rejection**. I found that when I opened up and told somebody, “I'm kind of a hot mess today. I've got some struggles. I've got some stresses,” that somebody really used it against them, judged them, or criticized them, and so we do a thing called generalization. Well, if that's what the human race is like, I'm never going to open up again. Self-sufficiency is a big part. Rejection is another part.
3. John Townsend: Then another part is **shame**. Shame is that internal function that we all have. We all have a bit of shame in us that says, **I don't want to appear weak**. I want to appear like I've got it together, and so nobody will know. Those three guys, **self sufficiency and rejection and shame, that'll keep a leader locked up and doing nothing but outgo, and call it relationship, and no inflow**.

### What happens if we don't change this?

Does this kind of isolation set you up for moral failure, or some kind of unethical behavior? Is that a predictor of that? Absolutely.

Nature abhors a vacuum. If you don't have solid people in you... The way I tell leaders is there's these three phases. You want to be fully functioning. I want to be a fully functioning person. I want to have all my 16 cylinders running like a Lamborghini. I want to make my mission. I want to be fully functioning and optimized, but to be fully functioning, **I've got to be fully connected and loved. I've got to have people in my tank, but to be fully loved, here's the hard part, I've got to be fully known**. Uh-oh, people got to know the good, bad, and the ugly, and so I go, I'll just be half known. Well, that means I'll be half loved, and I'll be half functioning.

John Townsend: I don't want that. I don't want that life. If it takes a risk to be fully known, and you know all the screw-ups I have, and you still like me, and that fills up my tank, then I want to be fully functioning. What I'll tell them is, **if nature abhors a vacuum, if you're not getting that tank full, your brain's going to go somewhere else. It's going to go to a relationship you shouldn't have, where there's comfort, or it's going to go to a substance, maybe drinking too much, or substances, or our old buddy, workaholism.** You and I work with people around the world that are stuck in workaholism. **It's just as addictive as the other things are.** Anytime somebody's got a relationship that's struggling them, or a substance, or a behavior like workaholism, it means there's **a vacuum of attachment.**

#### **FOUR QUADRANTS OF PEOPLE — How they contribute to our lives**

**Quadrant number one is be present.** Be present.

It means shut up and listen. Leaders have a hard time. We always have a nugget. We always want to share that, not time for that. Sometimes when people are struggling, they need empathy. I'm with you, and I'm with you in your well, in your well of struggle. I'm in it with you, in your well of challenge. Just be there for me and accept me, not a lot of words.

John Townsend: **Quadrant number two is convey the good.** Sometimes we need a little shot of emotional Prozac, giving us oxytocin when we've just had a stress or a failure or a hard conversation. We're down on ourselves. We need somebody to encourage us and say, hey, I still believe in you. I'm on your team. I respect you. It lifts us up. That's conveying the good.

**John Townsend: Third quadrant is provide reality.** Sometimes we need that Yoda figure that says, okay, here's why your cash flow did this. Here's what happened with you when your marketing plan failed. Here's what happened when you got a culture problem. I've done this before, done this a million times. We need that wise person, who'll give us the answers that are what we need. That's providing reality, good data, good information, good facts.

**John Townsend: Fourth quadrant is call to action.** Sometimes we need a kick in the butt, and somebody's got to say, you've got to do something. You've got to go have that hard conversation. You've got to do that report. You've got to do that scary thing. You've got to spend that money, and I'll be behind you. I'll be with you.

John Townsend: All of us, every week, Carey, we need somebody to be present with us, when we're struggling; to convey good, that they believe in us; to give us great data and information and feedback; and to call us to action. As a leader, we need to be giving that to our people, and we need to be **discerning enough to know what does that person need right now.** That's why, in the book, I've got that in a table form.

John Townsend: You can go to lunch with somebody and, as you're listening to them, say, you know, they don't really need advice right now. They're so down on themselves. If I kicked them in the butt, it'd be so discouraging. **I think they need to know I believe in them. It helps you to know how to give people what they need, and even more importantly, to receive what you need from the people in your life. It gives you a structure.**

Use this structure to be aware of what I need, and what others need.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Be Present</b></p> <p>Just be there for me and accept me, not a lot of words.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Convey the Good</b></p> <p>hey, I still believe in you. I'm on your team. I respect you.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Provide Reality</b></p> <p>wise person, who'll give us the answers that are what we need. That's providing reality, good data, good information, good facts.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Call to Action</b></p> <p>kick in the butt</p> <p>You've got to do that scary thing. I'll be behind you. I'll be with you.</p>

### Bad Conversations Are Disempowering so you have to Build your own life team – Here's How: 3 Lunches and a Meeting

You've got to go to your Microsoft Outlook contacts list. You go through the list, and you go, who would be a good candidate for somebody I could really open up to? You go through the list, and you'll end up with 20 or 30 people, who you think, you know, they might be a good person to open up to. You call them and say, "Hey, haven't seen you for a while, thought about you. Let's grab lunch." You grab lunch, and this system **involves three lunches, with a fourth meeting.**

**Lunch number one...** Instead of having what you call the status, like I'm achieving all these things, which is so boring, you talk about life and sports and business and all that stuff, how your family... but you make one vulnerable step. **You stick your toe in the vulnerability water, just a little bit.** You open up about something. You'll say something like, "**Well, we did struggle in cash flow,**" or, "**I've got some problems with my team. They're not gelling,**" or, "**One of my kids is, I don't know, she's 13, and she's smoking dope. It's scaring me,**"

Now you're going to get one of three responses that are going to tell you whether you move on with that person or not. **Number one** response goes like this, "So your kid's smoking dope," or, "You've got culture problems?" "You know, the weather around here is phenomenal. Can you believe it?" Oh my...Yep, the guy who doesn't want to go there. **Second response is,** "Oh, you've got problems with culture. Okay, I've got 14 books for you to read. Are you getting up early in the morning, and really thinking about your team? You know you need to be the first in and the last out. It's probably your issue. I think another thing you need to know is there's a great video I'm going to show you right now." **Advice, advice, advice, when you just wanted somebody to be there.** They're telling you, I just feel comfortable when I give advice. The advice monster, right? Not the A-Team either. **Third one** is the money. They put down their fork from their chicken salad, and they lean forward, literally lean forward. They look at you, and they go, "You've got culture problems?" John Townsend: "Yeah, it's hard." John Townsend: "**Man, I'm so sorry. I love your company. I love what you're doing. I love your vision. How does that feel? It must be discouraging.**" John Townsend: "Yes, discouraging." John Townsend: "Hey,

what can I do for you? I want to know more about it. **How can I help?"** What they're telling you is your vulnerability draws me in. I'm not going to reject you. I'm not going to judge you. I'm not going to advise you, and they're with you, what we call in the book, we're in the Well of Challenge. You're in the well with me, and that tells you, that might work.

### **Have another lunch, and do the same thing.**

Have a third lunch, do the same thing. Then, **by about the third one, they're starting to open up, too, because leaders don't have anybody to talk to**, because, like I said, they ended up leading everybody.

**About the fourth meeting**, third or fourth meeting, you say, I'm getting intentional about my personal growth. My professional growth is great, and I love... I'm in decent shape, and my marriage is good, and all this, but I may have not been intentional about me, and I'm finding that... I'm reading a lot of research about how important that is. I would like to meet with some very high performing, and yet good, good listening people in my life, to just go through life on some structured level. It can't be, I see you when I see you, because I'll never see you. I mean, I want to meet every couple weeks for lunch or whatever. Before they finish, the person goes, "I'm in." John Townsend: I mean, it's that fast. You know why? Because the other person, and because when I take CEOs through this, their person goes, "What are you talking about? I have to be in. I don't have these conversations with anybody but my wife either. Man, I love it that you opened up. I can't tell anybody this." All of a sudden, you've got a real friend, and that's where the magic happens.

**Relationships are mutual. You don't just start with, oh, I'm going into the deep end of the pool. You start in the shallow end, and it has to be reciprocated. They're mutual, and they're reciprocated.**

**Hang in the fog.** You know what happens? **So many times, we don't need the advice.** We just need to know somebody gets it, and they understand, and we solve our own problems. I mean, I was in clinical practice, before I started doing all the leadership stuff. Sometimes, I would just be there with a client, and I would say, "So it sounds like you're overwhelmed, and it makes you feel alone, and like you're also kind of scared about this." "Because I'm smart. I can figure out my solutions. I just needed to know I wasn't alone, and somebody got it." It's that powerful.

### **The Seven Groups Of People in our Lives – we need to be top heavy with most of our time spent with People in categories 1-4**

1. **Coaches – people with 10,000 hours of expertise**
2. **Comrades – 3-10 people on your life team.** People who know it all, care about you all, and they want to be there for you, but also they want you to change. I love that word mutual. They're mutual with you. They're in the fight together. They're in the fray together. They're dependable. They'll text you and say, "How's it going?" They're your comrades in arms, and very, very high nutrient value. We're growing together with each other.
3. **Casuals – cool friends that you kinda know.** Nice, positive people...the farm team for your Comrades.
4. **Colleagues – You want your colleagues to be relational people.** Be around colleagues that have these capacities. a) Relationally driven, b) competent, c) can work on teams.

5. **Care** – where we give back – We need to care about others who can't do what we can do and need us. Organizations that I volunteer with. If you give back, and you don't get anything for it, and somebody just says to you, "I don't know where I'd be without you. I don't know where we'd be without you," it releases more oxytocin in your system, and you feel great. You feel positive. You feel like, I took my place in the world. It reinforces that system, so you want to do it again.
6. **Chronics**. People that sort of never get their act together, because of their lack of interest in that. People with a flat learning curve, so you give them all these assignments to change their life and their business and their marriage, and they don't do it and say they didn't have time. They become a time drain.
7. **Contaminants**. Bad people. There are people, who don't have your best wishes, and they want to hurt your company. They want to hurt your church. They want to divide your family. They want to divide your soul. You cannot have any time spent with them. You have got to kick the dust off your sandals, and make sure you're not around them.

First thing you've got to do is build up your coaching category and your comrade category, and then start pruning back on the others. You're going to right-size it. That's where health comes from. That's where energy comes from, creativity, positive mood, focus. It comes from having the right nutrients from the right people. **Contaminants don't get a long, lingering dinner** talking about philosophy. I give them one meeting, or two, just to make sure that I've got the diagnostics right, because maybe they are just kind of foolish. Carey, I don't ever want to be a rude person, and I want to... If somebody needs a warning, I tell them there's a warning. I try to do the hard thing and say, "You know, you've got to change some attitudes here, because I'm concerned about you, and sorry, we just can't keep meeting. I've got to go do some other things." I have angered some people that, unfortunately, were contaminants, but you know what? I saved my marriage and my family and my finances and my business. Sometimes you've just got to cut it off. **We're always going to keep a chronic or two around**, maybe just for love purposes, or who knows, or just to have stories to tell, but yeah, I've got a couple. The thing about it is, what I've learned is that I don't like to leave people totally, unless they're a bad person. A chronic, I'll just... What I'll try to do is I'll just try to have less bandwidth, like instead of meeting every week, we can meet once a quarter.