Intro: Do you know there are three proven ways you can build trust throughout your entire organization, how you gain them, and retain them? The answer, next.

Female: This is the Flourishing Culture Podcast. Here’s your host, president of the Best Christian Workplaces Institute, Al Lopus.

Al Lopus: Welcome to another episode of the Flourishing Culture Podcast, where our goal is to equip and inspire you to build a flourishing workplace. We are here to help you eliminate workplace distrust, improve your employees’ experience, and grow your organization’s impact. And before we meet our special guest today, I urge you to subscribe to this podcast. As a result, you’ll receive our action guide. It’s our gift to help you lead your organization’s culture to the next level. To subscribe, simply go to bcw institute.org/podcast. Hit the Subscribe button, and receive our free action guide.

Also, if you could share this podcast with others, and rate it, it would really mean a lot to me. Thank you.

And now, let’s meet today’s special guest.

Hello, and thanks for joining us again on the Flourishing Culture Podcast. Today we’re going to look at inspirational leadership, which is one of the six of the eight drivers that can take the health of your workplace culture to the next level. And my guest today knows a lot about inspirational leadership because his character, leadership, and convictions are going to give you some fresh, new insights on how to improve and strengthen your own workplace culture. And with that, I want to welcome one of our most popular guests on the podcast, that’s Roland Warren, the president and CEO of Care Net. Founded in 1975 and based on Lansdowne, Virginia, Care Net is a nonprofit organization that supports one of the largest networks of pregnancy centers in the United States and runs the nation’s only real-time call center, providing pregnancy-decision coaching.

Roland, I’m so glad to have you join us. Welcome to the Flourishing Culture Podcast.
Roland Warren: Glad to be with you, Al. Thanks so much for having me as part of this. I really appreciate it.

Al: Yeah, well, I’m looking forward to our conversation. But before we get into our discussion now and what’s in store for our listeners, give us a snapshot of Care Net.

Roland: Okay. Well, as you said, Care Net’s a ministry that started in 1975. We were actually founded by a theologian named Harold O.J. Brown. Some folks may still remember Harold O.J. Brown and Billy Graham and Francis Schaeffer and C. Everett Koop, so some names that people connect with. And really, the focus at the time was—so Roe v. Wade had been decided in 1973. And for the most part, Protestants, or evangelicals specifically, we’re not really engaged in the issue. They were either sort of indifferent, hadn’t spoken out about it, or, frankly, in many cases, were pro-choice. And so a group of Catholic folks came to Harold O.J. Brown and said Protestants need to be involved in this issue, need to be sort of a force for life. And Care Net was really kind of founded out of that.

It actually started at the Christian Action Council, and at the time, it was sort of more of a kind of a Protestant version, so to speak, that was kind of engaging probably more on the advocacy side. And then over time, as Christians are apt to do, we started to see that local communities were putting pregnancy centers right around or near abortion clinics to offer a compassionate alternative to abortion. And so little projects started at Christian Action Council called Care Network. It was really kind of focused on helping this growing group of local pregnancy centers with training, technical assistance, support, cover, leadership, thought leadership, things of that nature, and the project just grew and grew.

And in the early ’80s, the board sort of made the decision to move more away from sort of a political-advocacy aspect of the pro-life movement and move more onto the care. So basically, there’s two aspects of pro-life movement: there is compassionate advocacy and compassionate care. And Care Net’s on the compassionate-care side of that equation to offer compassion, hope, and help to anyone who’s at risk for abortion. And that’s really what we do. We have a network of eleven-hundred-plus pregnancy centers in the U.S. and Canada, and we do all those things: providing technical assistance, support, training, certainly do a lot of thought leadership for the centers, and really help them do that.

And we’ve actually even expanded that kind of portfolio of work that we do now so that we also have an initiative called the Pregnancy Decision Line which is designed to basically—people come to us on the Internet or through the web or call us directly on our 800 line, and they’re people who are at risk for abortion. We’ve had even people calling from an abortion clinic themselves. We had one situation where a woman was actually in the bathroom of an abortion clinic, and she was changing her mind and wasn’t sure, and she’d looked us up on the web and got one of our Pregnancy Decision Line coaches on the phone. And that’s why the real-time coaching is really important, not just a referral to a pregnancy center, but we do that, but we also want to, basically, talk to that person right in that moment. So we do that.

And then we also have a robust church initiative through our Making Life Disciples ministry which is designed to equip churches to offer compassion, hope, and help to folks in the church at risk for abortion but also to transition people from pregnancy centers and from communities into church for
the ongoing support and ultimately discipleship to help them become disciples of Jesus Christ. And we do a lot of media stuff very focused on helping people certainly live out what we call pro-abundant-life perspective in the public square, and that’s another key aspect of what we do. So, those are the four things.

**AI:** I love it. Yeah, pro-abundant life. And Roland, how did you actually get into this role? You have a very interesting career path. I’m sure our listeners would love to hear what are some of the steps that you’ve had along the way that led you to this calling in your life?

**Roland:** Yeah. No, it’s an interesting question because I can see it more clearly now, looking back, than I could looking forward. But I went to Princeton undergrad, and my goal, really, at that time, was really to go into the business world and kind of be focused that way. And I got my girlfriend pregnant when I was in college, so that kind of connected to the story of where I am now. And as a result, we were facing a pregnancy decision, and we were encouraged to abort. We did not. We got married and have been married 37 years now. And it’s interesting because, at that time, it was sort of a challenge because my girlfriend was also going to Princeton, and there was this whole notion about when she went in to get her pregnancy test, it’s like how you going to graduate from Princeton with a baby? And then she want to become a doctor, and how you going to become a doctor with a baby? And it was that whole focus that really brought the life issue absolutely to us in a big, big way. And we decided to follow God’s leading, even though we weren’t following His plan initially, and we got married. And she graduated from Princeton, with not just one baby but with two, and then also went on to become a doctor. She’s been practicing medicine for over 25 years.

So I kind of solved the life issue right then, and we went on. But I still thought, “Well, this is kind of part of our life,” and I moved forward. I want to work for IBM right out of college and then went to work for Pepsi, got my MBA and was really on that path. But along that way, I got on the board of an organization called National Fatherhood Initiative because I had a heart for father absence and that issue because I’d grown up without my dad. And that really kind of took me out of the business world because I was with Goldman Sachs at the time, and I got a call from the guy who kind of found the organization and asked would I be interested in leaving Goldman Sachs for the lucrative world of nonprofit management. And it’s funny because I said at the time, they have gold at Goldman, and they carried in Sachs, and it’s a good Jewish firm, and Jesus was a Jew, and this has got to be God’s plan for me—Goldman. And it was pretty clear that God really wanted me not to do that.

And that really kind of took me out of the business world because I was with Goldman Sachs at the time, and I got a call from the guy who kind of found the organization and asked would I be interested in leaving Goldman Sachs for the lucrative world of nonprofit management. And it’s funny because I said at the time, they have gold at Goldman, and they carried in Sachs, and it’s a good Jewish firm, and Jesus was a Jew, and this has got to be God’s plan for me—Goldman. And it was pretty clear that God really wanted me not to do that.

So I actually ended up quitting my job in about nine days and went to work for National Fatherhood Initiative. Became president of that organization, was there for about 12 years, and got me really focused on the impact of father absence and the benefits of father involvement. And while I was doing that work, I got connected in with Care Net because I was looking for organizations that were at the nexus of children and family and that should be interested in engaging fathers and getting fathers to be involved in their work to help them accomplish their mission and vision. And since I had faced an unplanned pregnancy and I knew that although it was her body and her choice legally—my wife, or girlfriend the time; my wife now—her body and her choice legally, the reality was that my decision
impacted her choice. And so I knew sort of intuitively that there should be a robust aspect of the work that was really focused on engaging fathers during that pregnancy decision because he’s key. And that’s actually what we found out in research, that the father is the most-influential person in her decision to abort.

So that’s my path. And so my life and my work kind of connected together in Care Net. I came here in 2012. God kind of called me from National Fatherhood to Care Net and kind of bring in all that history and sort of my story and my background and my business background, all that together, and kind of, hopefully, using that in a way that glorifies God through Care Net. So, that’s it.

AI: Well, I can say that based on the staff engagement that you’ve got, it’s been a really good mix. It’s rare that we have 100 percent of an organization’s staff, regardless of the size, that are engaged, the way we define engagement. And that’s the way it is at Care Net.

But as you and I have talked, Roland, the BCWI’s FLOURISH model, inspirational leadership is one of the top-eight proven drivers that drive a healthy, flourishing culture, and that’s why I’m really looking forward to our conversation today. Inspirational leadership is really a key driver and one of the two strongest predictors of employee engagement in all Christian-led organizations, and at its core, we find that inspirational leadership is really connected to a leader’s relationship with Christ, and it’s all about demonstrating spiritual maturity and growing a deepening personal relationship with Jesus. And we see that inspirational leaders are perceived and experienced as direct, truthful, trustworthy, reliable, and consistent, and they also show caring compassion for employees. And when you hear these words, in your workplace, who comes to mind? Do you have a story that you might be able to share with us?

Roland: Well, you know, it’s interesting because from our standpoint, just the work that we do, it’s really just sort of required, when I think about the clients that we’ve had over the years that make a decision for life and the fact that it requires a selflessness and a compassion in order to do that. I mean, frankly, parenting is one of the most-selfless things that you could possibly do. And so I think from my standpoint, I think it becomes easier for our staff to sort of see that and understand that because the work that we’re doing is actually really focused on trying to help parent someone who’s facing a pregnancy decision, if you will, a parent actually become an inspirational leader within their own family. And the first step of leadership here is this decision to bring a child into the world in a circumstance that, for you, might be difficult. And there’s a saying I heard years ago that all noble things are difficult, right? All noble things are difficult. And so we have that as kind of the work that we do. That’s the end result. And so from my standpoint, it becomes one of those things that becomes very easy to talk about with the staff because we see “inspirational leaders” in the work that we do. And our goal ultimately is to create inspirational leaders in the form of parents who make a life decision even in the midst of circumstances that are very difficult.

And one of the things that I say often is that inspiration is like perspiration: it dries up. And so you’ve got to continue to focus on that, and you’ve got to move from inspiration to action very quickly, so we try to do things certainly within our environment that help people be actionable about the things that we put in place and that have a long, long period of time in terms of how we do that and how we try to inspire people to do that.
And I think the last thing I would say is that my view is obviously I’m a leader here. It’s sort of my role and my responsibility, but I do really try to have the perspective that everyone here is a leader in their own right in terms of the work that they do. We all have different roles, but from a leadership standpoint, I expect everybody here to be a part of that process. I’ll tell folks, “Look, I don’t want you to be just sort of a conduit. You need to be a filter.” In other words, if you had a conduit, just a pipe or water just runs through and you add no value, you don’t filter anything out, you add no value, just runs through, so to speak, as opposed to a filter which kind of does something different there. Whether you’re a new person here, you been here a day, you been here a week, I expect you to add values. When you come bring some content, so to speak, I expect you to be thinking about it, I expect you to have a point of view and be able to kind of speak that point of view effectively because it’s really critical within the organization. And I think as you continue to articulate that kind of perspective with folks, it really does make a difference. And I think that’s one of the reasons why folks feel so engaged, because we try to create an environment by God’s grace where people feel like, “Hey, I should have something to say, I should have a point of view, and that this is the environment where people are going to listen to that point of view.” May not necessarily act on it all the time, but we’ll certainly respect and listen to it and evaluate it.

AI: I love that. We’re really starting to just kind of get into the transformational story you’ve had at Care Net, because over the past six years, your workplace culture has gone from what we would consider a solidly healthy now to highly flourishing. And as I mentioned earlier, 100 percent of your staff are engaged, and you’re in the top-two percent of all parachurch mission organizations that we survey. So I’m really looking forward to talking about some of the key qualities of inspirational leadership.

I love some of the things you’ve said that are quotable already: all noble things are difficult; your goal is to help create inspirational leaders; and that inspiration’s like perspiration: it dries up, so you need to continue with the inspiration.

But, first, the survey revealed that Care Net is well managed. I mean, your staff are saying that. In fact, one of your employees said, “Care Net is well run and organized.” And to have an employee say that just in an open-ended comment is significant. And as you and I have talked about in the past, being well managed is highly correlated to employee engagement. So give us a couple of strategic action steps or initiatives that have helped make Care Net a well-managed organization. What do you have for us?

Roland: Well, one of the first things, really, from my standpoint and from our team’s standpoint, it really starts with the vision and the mission. If people don’t understand the mission of the organization and don’t have a sense of what the vision is for the organization, then it can be very easy for them to feel that the work that they’re doing is sort of this whole notion is that I’m doing work, but there’s a difference between sort of doing work and making progress, so to speak. And they can think that what they’re doing that really doesn’t matter that much. And when that happens and they can think, “Well, the management team is not managing very well,” because a core aspect of management is really managing you towards an objective. And so the first thing we really started on was really making sure the people understood our vision and our mission. So we did strategic planning early on, when I first got there; recast our mission, our vision.
And it’s interesting. I’ve been in the business world for a lot of years, and you’ll see a lot of mission statements and vision statements and all that kind of stuff. And what tends to happen is that people do all the planning, do these sessions, and then it kind of goes away, and it’s a poster on a wall, it’s in a brochure. But if you ask folks, “What is it? What’s your organization’s vision and mission?” they have no idea.

In fact, that’s one of the first things I did when I came to Care Net. I just took an index card, and I went round the room, and I said, “Okay, write down our mission and our vision.” And nobody knew it. I mean, nobody knew it. And I thought, “Well, when you don’t know where you’re going, you’ll get there every time.” So the first thing we need to do is make sure that we have a vision and a mission, but also, we need to make sure that folks understand it and can see how their work ties into it. And that’s a key management responsibility. So we did that.

So we actually have a process. We started a process where every quarter we would actually write the vision and the mission on an index card, and they get passed in, and we had this kind of goal so everybody knew it 100 percent. And one of my team actually said, “You know what? To help us get there, why don’t we start every Monday, before we do our devotions on Monday,” because we do devotions every week, “why don’t every Monday, why don’t we write out the mission and vision ourselves?” That was one of my team members. A person on staff said, “Why don’t we do that?” And the folks said, “Yep, let’s do that.” So now every Monday, we write out the mission and the vision on an index card and recite it to kind of get us going. So you walk through Care Net, folks know our mission and our vision. They know it word for word, every dot and every tittle.

And that’s really been a really important part of getting alignment, which, I’ve actually seen in the survey, alignment. And when people say, “Well, it’s well managed. I understand the importance of my work or how my work connects into the broader vision,” all those types of things are all connected to the fact that we started with a compelling vision by the grace of God and then a mission, and then we help people understand how the mission and the vision are connected.

And then the last piece of that really is just understanding strategy. And so we’ve got four key strategies, which I kind of laid out for you, that tie into the mission and the vision. And the other thing that has really helped with engagement is that when you have a mission and when you have a vision that people understand, then it gives people agency and a sense of empowerment that they can come and recommend that you do something. And when they do, they could connect it back and say, “This is how this is going to help us accomplish our mission and vision.” That’s a question that you hear often around here in a meeting. “Well, how is this helping us accomplish our mission and vision?” And if I have an initiative I want to get done, staff will come back to me and say, “Roland, how’s it going to help us accomplish our mission and our vision?” And if I can’t find a way that that actually does that, that’s work that we shouldn’t do, and everybody knows that they have agency and ability to communicate that. And that’s been really, really important in terms of how they view management, how they align the work that they do to the broader perspective of what we’re doing, and I think it’s had a big impact on our survey results.

AI: Well, that’s very interesting. So every quarter you asked everybody to write your mission and vision on an index card, and that’s now the way you start your Monday mornings. That’s a—
Roland: Way to start Monday mornings. And when I remember it, I come into the office, and the first thing I’ll do is I have a notebook, and I’ll write our vision statement and our mission statement, because they will ask me, “Roland, what’s our mission and our vision?” And if I don’t know it, then they’re going to say, “Wait a minute. You don’t know it.” So it’s important that everybody knows. And they actually did that to me one meeting. They said, “Roland, what’s our mission and our vision?” And I knew it, obviously—well, maybe not obviously—but that was really, really important, and that’s a way you’ll lose your credibility in a minute. So I would just challenge the folks that are listening to the podcast, if you’re leading an organization, do you know your vision, and do you know your mission? And if you don’t, you should. And if you don’t know it, then certainly your staff’s not going to know it. And if you don’t know it and your staff don’t know it, then it’s actually not a mission and a vision at all, because it’s not guiding you; it’s not leading you. And that’s how you end up getting mission creep and all these things that start to frustrate staff and make them think that what they’re doing is not important. And that’s significant.

Al: Yeah.

I trust you’re enjoying our podcast. We’ll be right back after this brief word about a valuable tool that can pinpoint the true, measurable health of your culture.

Male: What if you could get an upper hand on unwanted turnover, relationship conflicts, struggling morale, and unproductive staff, and, at the same time, increase the effectiveness and impact of your organization? You can with the Best Christian Workplaces’s Employee Engagement Survey. This popular, proven resource pinpoints the true health of your workplace culture and ways to improve it.

You’ll get a detailed breakout summary of the eight essential ways your culture and your organization can flourish, all from a principled, practical, faith-based approach that works. Join the more than 800 satisfied organizations, churches, and Christian-owned businesses who have said, “Yes.” Sign up online today at bcwinstitute.org. The Best Christian Workplaces’s Employee Engagement Survey. It’s your first important step on the road to a flourishing culture.

Al: All right. Now, let’s hear more from today’s guest.

You know, secondly, the survey revealed a high level of trust between leaders and staff, and that’s really foundational. Trust can be a very tricky subject for many leaders, and our listeners know that all too well. And as you know as well, Roland, trust is hard to build and easy to lose. What are some of the ways that you’ve worked to build trust on your team? What’s a step or an intentional approach that you’ve taken to help deepen mutual trust amongst your staff, amongst your people?

Roland: Yeah. That’s interesting. That is, of all the things, I think that is the key thing for any organization is trust. And people will say that it sounds kind of trite, but it is so incredibly significant. If folks don’t have trust, then you can’t be productive, not in an organization, not in a home, not in a country. I mean, trust is so incredibly significant. And that was one of the first things that I started to work on when I looked at our survey results going back in 2012. I started to look at trust, and I started saying, “Well, how can I build trust within the organization, both trust in the management staff but also trust between staff?” And so I came up with this perspective of I think we should have an
organization where it's a, basically, a no-look-pass organization. And so what I did was I used the analogy of basketball, which most people know something about, and that there's a thing called a no-look pass. And a no-look pass basically means that you are going to throw the ball to somebody else and not look at them. But in order for a no-look pass to work, and for a team that can do that very, very well—like Magic Johnson and the other guys are really great passers over time—there are two things that need to happen, and they're all built on trust. The first thing is the person who's not looking has to trust that when they throw the ball to the other person, that that person will be looking. So that's (a). And then the (b) is the person who's going to catch the ball has to trust the fact that the person who is going to throw it to them will know to throw it to them at the right time in order for them to score. So what I basically started talking about is this whole notion of basically having a no-look-pass organization. So in other words, when work gets passed to you from me, is it a no-look-pass type of situation?

And so I started this thing, and I actually developed something called a trust index, and I started asking quest—I put, like, four questions on that trust index. So when we do the Best Christian Workplaces's survey, I also do this trust survey. And basically, the trust questions are questions around the work that is being done. Do you trust that when you hand work to someone else that they’ll do it in a high-quality way? Do you trust that someone is not going to try to give you work that they should be doing? I mean, those kinds of things. And so I did that survey, and I did it by department.

And then we went back and looked at the results, and what I identified was there were some places, there were some areas, some departments, that didn’t trust each other. And then I started working on those individual departments on, what do we need to do in order to build trust between your department and the broader departments, without exposing anybody specifically. I started working with the managers, saying, “There’s a trust issue here that I need you to go and dig and find out where’s that trust issue coming from. Is it a specific person, a specific task?” things of that nature.

And so, just in the time we have, one area that I saw quickly was in our accounting department, that there were some issues there because the accounting department didn't feel that folks understood how important it was for them to hit deadlines in terms of getting work to the accounting department, because in most departments, there is some flex. In other words, I’ll give it to you today, I give it you tomorrow; there’s some flex. But when you have an accounting department, it doesn’t work that way. They have very fixed end dates in order to get financial reports out or to hit a certain objective for the IRS or whatever. So there’s not flex. And so there were some significant trust issues there, and we started to work on that. I actually had the accounting department present to the rest of the staff, to help the rest of the staff understand, when you don't give me that thing by that date, here's the impact that that has in a broader sense, which helped build trust and also helped build, certainly, a sense of teamwork and camaraderie between staff. But trust is important, and so I would encourage folks to think about what are some trust questions they can ask along with their survey to build trust, because if you build that, it really does move the rest of your survey results in a very positive direction.

AI: Yeah, it does. Let's talk about trust a little more. And I do, I love the no-look-pass concept because I've seen more times than not somebody has a pass coming to them, the no-look pass, and they're not looking, and it bounces off their shoulder or something, and there's no point scored.
You know, around trust, we often say that leaders can build trust by getting results and then showing compassion to their colleagues while modeling fairness and integrity, kind of a three-points-on-a-triangle approach: getting results, showing compassion, modeling fairness and integrity. So where have you seen this gaining traction, particularly integrity gaining traction, in cultivating trust inside the Care Net culture?

Roland: Well, I think, this may sound kind of odd, but I think one of the key ways that you do that is how you deal with performance issues. You know, one of things I’ve learned over the years is that you have to deal with difficult performance issues. When someone’s not performing properly, you have to take action because my experience has been if you don’t take action, good people leave and bad people stay, essentially. The person who’s not performing. People who are high quality want to work with other high-quality people, and they start to lose trust in management if there is someone who is not doing the work that should be done. And then management does not address it, it absolutely destroys trust between management; destroys trust between the employee, the management; destroys trust between the employees and each other as well. And so one of the key ways that we’ve done is really just really focusing on when there’s a performance issue or something like that, getting on that right away, dealing with that in a way that only affects that employee, what people understand. But people do understand that if there’s a performance issue, we’re not going to kick the can down the road and not address it.

And so we did a number different ways where there are issues, but we put a performance-management system in place, employee-evaluation system in place, which focuses on kind of core abilities and things of that nature along with some critical performance targets. And I think that’s been a good way for us, also, when there’s been a performance issue for us to have an objective, concrete way to kind of deal with that. But there’s confidence here that if there’s a performance issue, we’re going to deal with it. And I think in ministry in particular, that’s one of the challenges that I’ve seen often. I’ve been on a lot of boards where there are folks that are just not performing well, and the ministry team doesn’t take action, leadership team doesn’t take action because maybe there’s a view that taking action is unchristian or something like that, you know? And it’s not. I mean, you have to take action when there are performance issues. If you’re going to have a high-quality, high-functioning ministry, you have to take action, and that’s one of the key ways. And when you do it, it has the opposite effect to what maybe people think. It doesn’t kill morale. It actually builds morale because people know, “Hey, there’s accountability, there’s responsibility, and there’s fairness here. And because there are those things, I can trust, and therefore, I can do a high-quality job.” And that’s what we see have happened here.

Al: Yeah. When I hear, “Oh, we have a gray-space culture here, and it’s all grace,” it makes me nervous a little bit, I’ll have to say.

Roland: Well, it’s interesting that you say that because one of the things I talk to staff about is that our culture is based on love. We’re called to love each other. Okay, that’s great. Well, what is love? Well, what is love? Well, love is actually truth and compassion in balance. That’s really what love is. So in other words, if you love someone and you have compassion towards them, that’s great. But if you don’t have any truth, then that becomes—well, you see what I’m saying?

Al: It’s a balance, yeah.
Roland: You see what I’m saying? If you have compassion without truth, then it actually is not compassion at all because compassion comes from two words: the “com,” which is with, but the passion is what action. So in other words, if you have passion around something, you have to take action. So compassion is with action. Well, what action should you take? Well, you should take action that is true. Now, if you have truth but without compassion, well, then, that’s harsh. And so a love-based environment, a culture where the staff love each other, which is what we’re called to do as Christians, is one that’s going to have compassion and truth linked together.

And I find from a ministry perspective, interestingly, having been in the business world for a lot of years, from a ministry perspective, there will tend to be sort of this compassion perspective without this focus on truth, which is where the results-management stuff comes in. When I was in the business world, there was a lot more focus on the results-management stuff without a whole lot of compassion. But a Christian ministry’s supposed to have both of those things because that’s what was reflected with Christ. Christ loved people. In other words, He shared the truth, with compassion. He said to the rich young ruler, “This one thing you lack.” Why? Because He loved him, and He said it in a way that’s compassion.

So to me, from a management-philosophy perspective, that’s really key to why you have to take action when there’s a performance issue, and you have to deal with that stuff in a compassionate way. But you also need to have a truth perspective in terms of what you’re doing.

Al: And I also believe that works in a business environment even better than just the truth without compassion.

Roland: Well, that’s what the data show. I think the issue, Al, is that I think each of those environments has a natural tendency. So in the ministry side, there’s a natural tendency towards the compassion piece and discounting the truth. And on the business side, there’s the tendency towards the kind of truth side, with the discounting of compassion, because that seems weak or not business-like or squishy or something like that. But the reality is organizations that are high-performance organizations typically have a good balance of both of those things, although there are some notable exceptions that you hear about in the press where folks still deliver, and it’s not a very nice place to work, but either they’re making a lot of money or there’s other things that keep people motivated.

Al: Yeah, exactly. Care Net is on the front lines of one of the most controversial issues in our nation today, and I know you understand how important it is to lead with a healthy heart fueled by a close relationship with God. And your BCWI results indicate leaders exhibit the fruit of the Holy Spirit, demonstrate compassion, experience high levels of Christian fellowship. They see leaders put Christ first in daily decision making. And this allows Care Net to reflect Christ to the world in the work that you do. So if you had one regular practice that continues to keep your heart healthy, Roland, what would you say it is?

Roland: Well, it’s interesting. The pace of the leaders, the pace of the organization, my board chair tells me. And that’s not just from a business-performance perspective, but that’s also from a spiritual perspective. And I think for me, the best practice for me is keeping my eye on Christ and the fact that He’s called me here to this work, and He’s called me to this work at this time. And I think that from a
leadership perspective, I think God wants me to leave a mark and wants us all to leave a mark in His name, in permanent ink. So in that kind of thing, and so I’m very motivated by that.

And Care Net’s mission and vision is something that motivates me because we really envision a culture where women and men faced with a pregnancy decision are transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the core work of what we do, and then they’re empowered to choose life for their unborn children and then abundant life for their families. And so that’s the kind of thing that I kind of focus on both in terms of my prayer time, in terms of my Bible study time. And as I go through Scripture, I’m always looking for opportunities to take a biblical narrative, if you will, to see Care Net’s story in the story of Scripture.

And it’s been pretty easy to do because if you think about it, the Christian faith started with an unplanned pregnancy from a human perspective. So when God gave me that, when I first got it, it’s like, “Oh, get it.” So this is ground zero. Our faith started with an unplanned pregnancy from a human perspective, with a woman facing a pregnancy decision and had all these obstacles, all this uncertainty that was setting before her. What was going to happen? How’d this happen? What’s Joseph going to say? What’s my family going to say? How am I going to deal with this? And what did she do? Instead of focusing on the uncertainty of what she didn’t know, she focused on the certainty of what she did know: there was a life growing inside of her, and that wasn’t a life worth sacrificing but a life worth sacrificing for.

And so for me, that’s been very inspiring for me, that this is ground zero, because every single time we do the work that we do and we help people do the work that they do in terms of the network and others out there, we’re actually retelling the most amazing true story that’s ever been told, which is Christ coming into the world and sacrificing His life so that we might have eternal life. And really, this whole notion about abundant life and came not just so we might have life but have it abundantly, it becomes a core thing. So for me, it’s just very easy for me to kind of, as I do my Bible study and other things, I’m working on ground zero. I’m working on actually something that’s so central to our faith that it’s easy for me to sort of find that in Scripture and then see the stories and the narratives in Scripture that actually support that and help us communicate those things into the public square and into the work that we do.

AI: Yeah. Boy, that’s great. Many of the leaders listening to this podcast are thinking about ways they can prepare the next generation for leadership. You’ve mentioned at the top of the podcast about how that’s just one of the things that you do to create inspirational leaders. When you look back on your own leadership journey, who is a leader who poured himself into you, Roland? What did that look like? Is there an example you’ve got?

Roland: That’s an interesting question. I don’t have an individual person per se. It’s sort of a composite of different people along the way. It’s sort of been my journey. I did a lot of Fatherhood work. People always ask me that, who is the father? And I really didn’t have one. But just different people along the way gave me bits and pieces.

I remember my very first manager. She was just an amazing person. She was a real servant leader. This is in a business setting, when I worked for IBM. I just reconnected her after decades, and we connected
on LinkedIn. And I told her, I said, “You were just such an amazing—“ I was right out of college, and she was such an amazing leader. I was so inspired by her, and she got promoted, which is what happens to good folks. And then I had one of my tougher managers. Super tough. I mean, super tough. A woman that I worked for. Every time I’d see her, I’d see her coming to my area, and I’d get up and go to the men’s room. She was that kind of person. I mean, absolute tough, tough, tough manager. But I learned so much from her. Her focus on excellence and doing things in an excellent way and being prepared when you go into meetings, and all that stuff. And she was a manager that when I got my first management job, she was kind of like the boot camp, when you think about that drill sergeant, she was that kind of person. And when I went on area staff with IBM, and she prepared me so well. I still remember, every day, lessons that she taught me. At the time, it wasn’t very pleasant, but now looking back, I’m like, “Wow, that was something that I really needed at that period of time that was there as well.” So I’ve had different managers and different leaders along the way who really inspired me.

And then there’s just some people from history. I love William Wilberforce and his focus on the long game, despite obstacles. Not letting your worries about tomorrow steal your joy today. Very, very focused that way. I actually have kind of thought about that, that God’s given me these two great objects. Like, he had the abolishment of slavery and the Reformation of Manners; mine is restoration of fatherhood in our nation and protecting the unborn. Those two great objects. I’ve really been inspired by Dr. Martin Luther King and his focus on the transformational model and actually a ministry focus to protecting the most vulnerable.

So it’s been a lot of different folks from that perspective have kind of helped me along the way. I wouldn’t say it was necessarily one individual person, but it’s been a composite of different people along the way who’ve kind of poured into me at different points. And I would just say, and that’s the heart that I have for other folks. I’m in my late 50s now, and I really think we should be pouring back into that next generation. So I’m always looking for opportunities to do that. And when somebody leaves Care Net and when I was with National Fatherhood Initiative and I’d see them go on to other organizations and have an amazing impact, it just pleases me so much because that really is what you should be doing. I mean, Christ did that. He had a model that way where He built disciples to be disciples who make disciples. And I think from a leadership standpoint, we should have that same perspective as well.

Al: And that’s why I ask the question, and I think that’s good for all of our listeners to hear that. Who is it that we are mentoring, because especially young leaders coming into the workplace, that’s really an opportunity to have an impact on them.

In light of all this, I have one special question to ask. Of all the many, many mothers who’ve given birth to children, mothers whom Care Net came alongside and served, can you tell us a particular mother or child, a story, that reveals why Care Net exists? Do you have one of those stories?

Roland: Yeah. It’s interesting because I have an opportunity to speak at pregnancy-center dinners often, banquets, and it’s just an amazing opportunity for me to get out and to see the work that’s being done and to hear the stories of folks who are out there. And I think one of the things, a particular event that was really very compelling to me was a young lady who was basically about to have an abortion. I mean, she was there. And after the event, we got an opportunity to chat a little bit, and she kind of told
me more of her story. And the thing that really was so incredibly compelling for me, it really kind of tied a bow around why God brought me through the Fatherhood work and the other pieces, she said that she was talking on the phone with her boyfriend. She had an appointment for the abortion clinic that morning, and she said he told her not to do it and that he didn’t want her to do it. And she said, “Well, I’ve already got an appointment scheduled.” And he was just so compelling to her that he was going to step up and take responsibility for their child. And I see that so often. That’s actually what we found in our survey is that the most-influential person in a woman’s decision to abort is the guy who got her pregnant, and that’s the first person she talks to often, and he’s the most influential. And I saw that specifically with her story, and I was able to kind of connect with her a bit after and support her a bit as much as we could because she was pretty far from us, and actually, I tried to reach out to the guy who was her boyfriend who wasn’t at the event. But I think for me, that particular piece kind of brings all of my story together, this role that men play, significant role that men play, in pregnancy decisions. And Care Net’s mission now is really kind of trying to help more and more men be engaged in the process because life decisions need life support, and the guy who got the young lady pregnant is the first life support that helps that unplanned pregnancy not become a crisis pregnancy, and so that’s a big piece there.

Al: So, Roland, that’s great.

Given all that we’ve been talking about, especially about inspirational leadership and the need for healthy, flourishing workplace cultures, what’s one final thought you’d like to leave with our listeners?

Roland: I think my big thing is that if you’re in a situation where maybe your results are not where you want them to be from a survey perspective or whatever, it’s a process that’s worth going through. I can just tell you I’ve been with Care Net for six years, and I’ve just seen how important this process has been for our organization in terms of building a culture that is a best Christian workplace and, frankly, is honoring Christ more and more each day because we’re focusing on some principles that are very significant, which is the stuff that you find in the survey. So I would just encourage you to kind of stay at it, even if there have been some ups and downs or some obstacles, really just kind of stay at it, to look at your results, and really kind of think outside the box rather in terms of ways that you can address those, and involve your staff because I think that people want to work in that kind of environment. So you’re not kind of working against yourself. Folks do want to work in an environment that’s a great place to work, and so they’ll be advocates for you, but it’s going to take, obviously, some work and some transparency from a leadership standpoint, particularly if you’re struggling around results in one category or two. But I would just encourage you to stay at it because it’s worth it.

Al: Yeah, great. Roland Warren, president and CEO of Care Net, thank you for sharing your wisdom, insights, and stories, and thank you for extending your ministry to the leaders who have been listening and benefiting from all you’ve shared with us today. Thanks, Roland.

Roland: You’re welcome. And thanks, Al, for all you do to help ministries be the best they can possibly be.

Al: Oh, thanks.
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