



The Flourishing Culture Podcast Series
“How CRISTA Used The FLOURISH Model to Build Healthy Relationships”
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Mike Cole

Male: Welcome to the Flourishing Culture Podcast, where you’ll learn how to build a flourishing workplace culture that drives the ministry impact of your organization, your church, or your company, brought to you by the Best Christian Workplaces Institute. Now, here’s your host, BCWI president, Al Lopus.

Al Lopus: Hello, and thanks for joining us again on the Flourishing Culture Podcast. Today we have the pleasure of talking with Mike Cole, senior vice president of human resources and the chief people officer at CRISTA Ministries in the Seattle area. Hi, Mike. So glad to have you on the podcast today.

Mike Cole: Thanks, Al. It’s good to see you. It’s nice to see you in person. Good to do this in the same room.

Al: We’re in the same room, in the Best Christian Workplaces Institute studio.

Mike: I like that.

Al: Also known as my office.

Mike: Perfect.

Al: Yeah.

Mike: It’s a nice view.

Al: It’s great. So glad to have you on the podcast. Mike, I’ve been looking forward to our time together for a long time, and I’m especially excited to talk to you about the culture turnaround at CRISTA Ministries over the past 10 years, and, at least, you know, the last chapter since your arrival. But first, tell us a little bit about yourself and the scope of CRISTA.

Mike: Thanks, Al. I'll tell a little bit about my road to get here. I've been fortunate that I've really grown up in my career inside of two organizations. I joke that one of them's a little Midwestern retailer called Target, and the other one's a Seattle coffee company named Starbucks. People may have heard of them.

Al: Two little companies.

Mike: Two small companies.

Al: Yeah.

Mike: Some local companies. So, it's been it's been nice to experience that as part of my career. You know, in the time that I worked for Target, I moved coast to coast, met my wife, had three kids in 39 months, adopted our son from Ethiopia, and it was just a great experience, and it fit well with the culture that was within Target as well. When I went to Starbucks, it wasn't that big of a change. Starbucks also very focused on supporting people, very connected to the customer. In fact, I still remember the mission statement from Starbucks: to inspire and nurture the human spirit one person, one cup, one neighborhood at a time. That really resonated with me.

So when I got contacted in the summer of 2016 through a leadership network that I'd been part of about an organization called CRISTA, you know, I'm embarrassed to say my first reaction was who is CRISTA?

Al: Who are they?

Mike: Yes. So I'll have to explain that. But I knew the radio station, I knew a little bit about it, and I went in for my first interview, and my first interview was with the CEO, Bob Lonac, which, who has their first interview with the CEO? But what I really liked about Bob was that he wanted to make sure that he could have a relationship, a really good connection with whomever came into this new HR role they were creating. So I got a chance to spend time with him. I also got a chance to spend time with a member of one of your staff, Giselle Jenkins, who had done some work with CRISTA that was extremely helpful. So, through a lot of prayer and tough decision, I made the decision to come over in a newly created position, which—so we still joke about being called the chief people officer, but it's all right. We really wanted to communicate that CRISTA wants to focus on people.

Al: Yeah.

Mike: Part of being new into any new position, it's either great or horrible, really. You either get to exceed the low expectations people have set, because they have no idea what to expect, or you could never live up to the wildest dreams they had that this position will be the answer to everything. But getting started, part of what really helped with my boarding into CRISTA was getting a chance to work with Best Christian Workplace, specifically go through the results. Been working with Best Christian Workplace for some time, been a best Christian workplace eight different years.

Al: Yeah, right.

Mike: So, that helped as an introduction, coming into the organization. So, maybe just a little bit about CRISTA?

Al: Yeah, tell us a little bit about who is CRISTA and what are these ministries that CRISTA's involved in.

Mike: So CRISTA is made up of 2,000 people, across seven ministries, in 27 countries. So the seven ministries that we have, we have world concern. World concern is international. It works in some of the most-neglected regions of the world. And the goal is to abolish the core causes of poverty and emphasize livelihood, training, literacy, and education.

The second one that is internationally focused is Christian veterinary mission, and we call that CVM, and their mission is really to work with veterinarians in their practices here in the U.S. but also to take those vets that are interested in going on short-term or long-term missions internationally to work in some of those economies where, quite honestly, animals are the center of those economies.

Al: Mm-hmm.

Mike: So we come back into the U.S. Talk about CRISTA Media, we have four radio stations—three in the state of Washington, one in Texas—plus three online-streaming stations. Here in Seattle we have King's Schools, which is private Christian education from preschool to 12th grade. And then we have Seattle Urban Academy, which is ninth grade through 12th grade, which really is high school for an alternative environment for kids coming from very high-risk environments. We also have two camps: one that specializes in horses, and then, believe it or not, the other one specializes in motorcycles, which I don't know where it was when I was growing up, but I would've been all over that.

Al: Yeah, really. That sounds like a lot of fun to me.

Mike: It is. It is a lot of fun. The last environment that we have, last ministry we have is called CRISTA Senior Living. And that really is independent living through to assisted living through to what people think of as nursing care, including physical therapy. But all seven of those combined together are under that umbrella of CRISTA Ministries.

Al: And you've got a one, kind of a theme sentence that describes your purpose at CRISTA Ministries, don't you?

Mike: Yeah. The easiest way to say it is our mission statement is to love God by serving people.

Al: Yeah, right.

Mike: But we often talk about we are a family of ministries.

Al: Yeah. As you say, I think of it as kind of a holding company for different ministries, but a family of ministries is a great way to describe it.

Mike: Well, "family" always sounds better than "holding company."

Al: Yeah, it certainly does. Especially in a Christian environment.

Mike: Yeah.

Al: And especially from the chief people officer.

Mike: Well, I try to live up to the title a little bit, anyway.

Al: Absolutely. So, considering your extensive experience in large corporate organizations, what attracted you to CRISTA and to Christian nonprofit work? What really brought you in?

Mike: Yeah. I think people who have only been, say, maybe a nonprofit or Christian or any religious organizations might look out in the world and think of secular organizations as just a bunch of bad people all fighting to get profits.

Al: Yeah.

Mike: And I can tell you that the two large organizations I worked for really did want to treat people well. I got to see it from the inside: good people wanting to make good connections. And as people tried to lead well and get to the heart of what it was to lead well, it was hard to go all the way to what is your core values and core beliefs. But that's different. Once I'm able to come over into a Christian organization, I can talk about what is it that really drives us?

Al: Yeah.

Mike: It becomes more than just, "I want to do the right thing." It's "I've got an example, I've got a commitment," and it resonated with me. Talking to a CEO who is very focused on relationships, who wants to always do the right thing, be highly professional, our worlds aren't so different. We might have shareholders in the for-profit world, but in the nonprofit world, we have donors, and I can tell you that donors have just as much if not more interest in the success of the organization, just like a shareholder would. So I often think of them very much the same.

Al: They're very much investors, aren't they, donors as well as shareholders.

Mike: Yes. Just the return on investment they see is not necessarily measured in dollars and cents.

Al: Yep. Well, as you've already touched on CRISTA, it's certainly a unique organization, this a family of ministries, and it's also complex, isn't it, with all of these different kinds of ministries. Give us a synopsis of both the breadth and the complexity of CRISTA.

Mike: First, we really are a family of ministries, and so families can be messy. I mean, I know we want to look Instagram-ready all the time. We just did our fall pictures as a family; we want to look perfect.

Al: Yeah.

Mike: But, you know, I just went through and kind of described how different each of our ministries are. I mean, in one ministry you have to be a veterinarian in order to do what we do. In another, you have to be certified in how do we take care, from an elder-care standpoint, you have to be a teacher. So when you have people that speak very different functional languages, what is it that ties us together, what needs to be the same, and what needs to be different?

As we work through the complexity of when should we be consistent and when should we be unique, the one thing that we coming back to is that we have to be ready to serve people past the road where the road ends. We have to be able to do it past where people have kind of reached no other answer of what it is that they can do. And we need it do it through a shared resource model. So we have things like centralized facilities, information technology, HR, security, and so in those parts of our organization, they have to be nimble enough to say, "CVM, I know what you need." And it's not exactly the same as what King's Schools need, but can they translate that so that they're being unique where it needs to be and inconsistent in other places?

So, it's a little bit of a dance. I mean, I kind of joke sometimes that it can be like a middle-school dance where you've got all the boys on one side and the girls on the other and everybody knows a different dance and how do you get them to come into the middle. But our faith is what brings us together.

Al: I can imagine, as I think about this, Mike, and the complexity of CRISTA, I mean, even from a culture standpoint and a human-resource implementation standpoint what a senior-living organization needs, what the skills and competencies are of a first-grade teacher can be really different.

Mike: Yes.

Al: So trying to recruit individuals for those jobs in those very different organizations, it does add complexity, doesn't it.

Mike: Yes. And it can get tough to measure, too.

Al: Yeah. Based on your experience with corporate HR roles at Starbucks and Target, what are some of your initial impressions about CRISTA's approach to measuring and improving its employee engagement and culture overall?

Mike: Yeah. I know from my time at Target and Starbucks, measuring a large group of people's engagement is hard. It's tough. Trying to figure out what it is that the examples or the expectations are of people working in different types of industries or work environments can be really different. So I was familiar with that complexity coming in. But what I really appreciated about what CRISTA had decided to do was in engaging with Best Christian Workplaces and using that language, it really brought together both "do I feel engaged," but not just from "do I like where I work," but from a faith standpoint, do I feel that connection on what it is we stand for as Christians, not just are we a good place to work. So that was a helpful way to come in and start thinking a little deeper about how we measure engagement.

AI: So, questions that we would ask, like the level of Christian fellowship that you experience or even the Christian character of leaders, it really brought a depth that you hadn't experienced before.

Mike: Yes. And I think specifically what brought that depth was that in the workplace, we're trying to measure success—maybe it's profit, maybe it's how many people we connect with in maybe our personal Christian lives—that we can answer some of those questions you just mentioned. But what we believe at CRISTA is how we connect with our faith actually makes us better in what we do as a nonprofit service organization, like, the two are inextricably linked. It's very difficult to pull them apart. So if we can do both well, we do the whole thing overall really well. And we don't survey that way in other organizations.

AI: Right, right. You've listened to our podcasts in the past. What are some of your reflections? What have you learned about our podcast?

Mike: You know, it's interesting. I was just listening to the podcast with, I think it was Troy Meachum, and he was talking about that correlation between culture and revenue. And we talk about that specifically. Where we have a strong culture, where we have clarity of what it is we're called to do, we do see momentum get built really quickly, and we measure—we do have some of our ministries are fee-based ministries, so we do have a profit margin that comes in. Other places, it's are we reaching more people—and its donor)? So, that connection for us is really clear.

I think the other thing, we were talking earlier about a podcast where Jeff Lockyer was talking about experiencing the kingdom before you can share it. And I was smiling because we say something close, and it's probably not as sophisticated as what he was saying, but we say, you can't share what you don't have. And so if we're trying to serve people and we can't serve each other, or we don't have an idea of how to do that, then we're not very effective at doing that for others.

AI: Yeah. We hear over and over again what you bring to leadership is only who you are, and that really comes from the inside. Let's take this one step further, Mike. Prior to engaging BCWI, give us one area of CRISTA's culture whose health and progress you wanted to measure.

Mike: I knew that we had been a best Christian workplace eight different years, but we started to plateau. We were in that healthy, strong area, and we really want to get as high up that scale as possible. I mean, the score kind of reflects it, but we want to not just see it in the score, but we want to feel that in our culture. This year we've received quite a bit of feedback on some changes we made to our retirement plans, and so we are digging into, is that a change that in substance we need to do something different or could we have communicated it better? What was it that we could've done better with that? On the other hand, we had our biggest jump at CRISTA in CRISTA being well managed. Two of our highest-rated items was CRISTA demonstrating compassion for people at all levels, and my supervisor cares about me as a person. And I have to admit that I am pretty proud of that, but we really have to protect this in our culture.

So we are an organization that works on relationships. We are not a heavily structured systematized organization. We really want to go deep into the connection between a leader and their team, because that's also the relationship we're looking to establish with those that we serve. So we are really wanting

to continue to go deep into any place we can—as helped measured by the best Christian workplace into those areas.

Al: Yeah. Mike, your insights set the stage to focus on the change agent, the proven strategic tool that we've used, and, of course, we're talking about the FLOURISH model, our approach that many ministries have used. So, you've worked with our FLOURISH model now for three survey cycles, and I'd like to get your thoughts and have you tell our listeners a brief story of how the FLOURISH model has influenced your approach to measuring and improving the health of the workplace culture at CRISTA.

Mike: Yeah. So once I really grabbed onto the fact that flourishing is not just a goal, it's also an acronym, and started to understand, like, fantastic teams, right at the beginning, right, the F. The L in life-giving work. Those are two measures where we're actually flourishing. Those are places that we are in that flourishing range, and they're two areas that keep getting better each year, and these seem to be what are setting us apart from other organizations. We jumped from healthy to flourishing this year, driven mainly by our focus on building healthy relationships throughout the whole organization.

I think the two specific tactics I can point to is we really narrowed in our focus on making sure we're hiring the best person possible—highly professional, service driven, Christ centered—and then I think the other thing that we've done, especially over the last probably two years, is get closer in on identifying any place where there's tension where we need to hold, what we're calling, crucial conversations sooner.

Al: Yeah. And Mike, just, you know, historically, it's amazing to me how you've improved as an organization on this fantastic teams, particularly being able to work across departments. That was a low score. I can tell you, 10 years ago now, it's one of your best scores, relatively speaking, and crucial conversations and knowing how to have those crucial conversations certainly has been helpful, hasn't it?

Mike: Yes. You know, crucial conversations, of course, people will recognize comes from a book that we adapted, and we talk about in Matthew how it is that we're supposed to address some of that conflict. But, you know, the idea of it and actually doing it is really hard. And I got to give Bob, our CEO, credit. One of his quotes is if you really care about something or care about someone, you'll have the hard conversation with them. So that's been very helpful for us.

Al: Well, and repeatedly, as I have conflicts occasionally with people and let them fester, then I read John where it says you can't love God and hate your neighbor, or, you know—

Mike: Yes.

Al: —you're really not a Christian, is what he's saying—

Mike: Yeah.

Al: —in that. So that's motivation as well.

Mike: Right. No pressure.

Al: No pressure.

Mike: Yes.

Al: Yeah, that's not important, really, Yeah. Oh, gosh. So, I really like that about the importance of relationships. How about a before-and-after story about one of our eight FLOURISH drivers and the way it's helped advance your culture at CRISTA by loving God by serving people, as you had said is your mission.

Mike: Yes. We talked earlier about you can't share what you don't have. And if we say in our mission that we're loving God by serving people, do we serve each other the same way we serve people? And this is where having such different sorts of ministries and very specialized people with strong expertise can be a place of potential tension. And as I started, we had one area that has a very specialized skill set in how they minister to their audience, how they minister to the people they serve, and they know that group really well. We have another department that supports them, and they also have a very special set of skills. They have insights into how to do certain things around, say, communicating or telling a story. They know that really well. And you bring those two groups together, and both are probably right that they have a great approach. And so we're trying to say, how do we bring those two groups together who have really good approaches and are almost always right, and put them together and make it even better?

So as we start to measure where are those tensions happening, where do we need to have those conversations, and start teaching people on how to have those conversations, how do you even start? What's your mindset? We brought the two teams together and appealed to common desire. What is it that both sides want to achieve? The second part of that was, can we be really clear in our understanding of what that skill set the other group has so we know what we could benefit from?

I think the last part is, and we had to even introduce some project-management language around the RACI model: who's responsible, who's accountable, who consults, who informs. So we're not just assuming, "Hey, do you have the ball? Do I have the ball? Who's doing this?" I think the last thing that we did in this situation is a few years ago we introduced Lead Like Jesus training into our organization, and it has become a common language. How do we do things? What do we expect? And one of the things that we talk about in that training in that our core values for us are grace, forgiveness, encouragement, and community. And when we really do that and translate into plain language and plain actions for people, really does help us say, "You might be right, I might be right, but how can we be more right together?"

Al: 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 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 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.

Let's go back for a minute. You mentioned RACI and project management, and, you know, there's many Christian organizations and I think of a lot of churches that I hear in focus groups employees continue to say we're just not managing our projects effectively. You know, we're all about—you know, we see in Christian organizations all about vision and mission, not so much about project management and execution. Tell us what are you doing around that. Give us a little more detail.

Mike: Yeah. I hope this is not too controversial, but, Al, I got to tell you: you can be Christian and be good at project management.

Al: Okay.

Mike: Yes, you can be in a spiritual environment and measure that things get done. And one of the things we say at CRISTA is we have to be highly professional, and part of that is saying we actually have a goal of where it is that we're trying to go. We do track things. We do say, are we achieving those goals? I mean, it's easy to talk in any environment nonprofit about financial goals because that's such a driver. But how about even goals of how many people are we reaching, how many people are hearing us, how are we interacting with them? And when you start to break that down, we use different types of software. We do different types of templates, of approaches. You know, the RACI model being probably one of the most commonly known out there, but we have to introduce that into our environments so people have a way of talking to each other. As I said earlier about who's doing what and making sure that's really clear.

Al: R-A-C—

Mike: I.

Al: I. Okay.

Mike: Yes. Now, I know in a Christian environment, when I start talking about things that are RACI, it gets a little touchy, so I have to—just to clarify, it's who's responsible, who's accountable, who consults, and who's informed. And that really does give us a lot of clarity of what's my job in this situation.

Al: And you've been doing some training, and, again, to connect the dots with what we had said earlier, one of the improvements you had is that CRISTA were well managed. And I see that as a real connection to that question, which is highly correlated to employee engagement.

Mike: Yeah. I think the other one that probably correlates as well is that there's good communication across teams. And we want to be really good at that. So there's plenty of areas where we need to get better, but where we've really had the most tension, that's been really helpful for us.

Al: Mike Cole is RACI.

Mike: Oh, thank you. I'm going to go—T-shirts now. I can see them. Not going to put that on my resume, I'll tell you that much.

Al: Mike, we know that every major initiative in an organization has its own language—we're talking about that right now—but the FLOURISH model has its own unique terms. How has the language of the FLOURISH model seeped into the CRISTA culture to give people greater definition and ownership about growing and improving the health of your culture?

Mike: Yeah. This is where we really need to go further faster, where we need to go next. We do have this shared language around crucial conversations. In fact, people will even say to me, "Hey, Mike, I had a crucial conversation with that person," and I don't have the heart to tell him you don't have to call it a crucial conversation, but it's shared language. People really understand. So as we get comfortable talking about these things, it really helps understand, are we doing it well?

When we talk about the FLOURISH model, or we go and ask people through the survey, "How are you feeling about these things?" what I want us to do better is tell people upfront, even if it's at when we start to interview and hire people, this is what we value. Using the same language as the FLOURISH model, saying "This is what we value; this is what we expect," so that when we're really asking people, "Is this what you're experiencing?" they can quickly connect it to, "I understand what that means. That was explained when I started. That's reinforced often in my job. And so when I'm asked that question, I can really easily answer it because it's familiar language to me."

Al: Yeah. So, beginning even to use that language as you interview, as you do performance reviews, even just to inculcate it into your culture.

Mike: Yes.

Al: Mike, I know your president, Bob Lonac, has really been a strong advocate of building a healthy culture, as you've pointed out. He's very relationship oriented, comes from a Young Life background where it's all about relationships. And leadership development is also key to this, and one of the ways that you strengthen the leadership pipeline at CRISTA is the Lead Like Jesus program. Tell us how has that been helpful.

Mike: The mission of Lead Like Jesus—and for those that maybe aren't familiar with it, it's originally from a book called *Lead Like Jesus* that was written by Ken Blanchard, Phil Hodges, and Phyllis

Hennecy Hendry, and their vision is that someday everyone everywhere will be impacted by someone who leads like Jesus. So, for example, they believe that the skills and knowledge can't replace character and integrity. Just because I think I know better, if it's not coming from my heart, it's not going to be better. It really involves the alignment of what we talk about around our heart, our head, our hands, and our habit. And the belief is that leadership happens any time someone is influencing the thinking, behavior, or development of another; and if you have influence, you're a leader. So that means anybody that's sitting in one of our encounters or classes, nobody gets to check out, because everybody's got influence, even at least over themselves. So we use Jesus in this because what often is a little bit of an awakening for people is when they start looking at what did Jesus experience in His time as a leader on Earth, it parallels so many things that we experience in both Christian nonprofit workplaces as well as secular for-profit workplaces.

Al: You know, I remember and recall, Mike, in my own marketplace or secular experience, there wasn't a lot of conversation in leadership development about character. Character wasn't really a word that came up much, but Lead Like Jesus really gets to character development. Is that similar with your experience?

Mike: Yeah. I would say, again because I was fortunate to work for some very people-centered organizations, there's been a lot more insight and work done into the psychology of, if you don't have a core compass or a true north, that it's very difficult in times of stress, times of pressure, to have what comes out of your mouth be what you really believe. If there isn't that core, and I can say this without even talking spiritually, if there isn't that piece in someone's core, then under those times of stress—not enough time, not enough information—people don't get a chance to plan what to say, so what comes out. So I think that idea is growing more and more. The funny thing is that the Bible said this a long time ago, so I'm glad that we're seeing it coming in directly in Christian workplaces and maybe indirectly in non-Christian workplaces.

Al: Yeah, I agree. You know, another one of the essential drivers of a flourishing culture that we've seen improvement at CRISTA on is fantastic teams—I mentioned this earlier—and especially across departments. And you've got this family of ministries, and they're different in many cases, and their purpose, their function is different in terms of what they do. Share with our listeners how Bob Lonac and CRISTA has truly built fantastic teams, which have in turn clearly positively impacted the ministry over the years.

Mike: When Bob first started, oh, this was 12 years ago now, the number of ministries, the type of ministries was different than what they are today. And so some of the difficult decisions that had to be made are, what is being really effective, what maybe isn't as effective? We had, for example, a Christian staffing organization that maybe we weren't the best at doing that. And so we decided that might be work that can be done better elsewhere. We had some Christian counseling that was probably done better independently than all together. So there's some difficult decisions that have been made over the years of where do we maybe contract or go deeper in some areas.

What we look at now as an organization across seven is do we go to eight? Do we go to nine? What is it that indicates to us that we should scale? And we have really smart, Spirit-led people that will take a

look at that and say, as our mission continues to be love God by serving people, where is it that we're going to be able to serve people best and which ministries will we be able to do that best through?

Al: I've been really pleasantly impressed, I guess you could say, with the level of cooperation across ministries and how there's sharing across ministries to bring best practices from one to another.

Mike: Yeah. I think an example of that, where I really enjoy seeing this, is when I walk onto campus, physically right next to each other are two environments. We have our King's high school, and then we have senior living. And I'm thinking what two populations could be least alike. You know, these kids and these elderly individuals, they are not going to want to spend time together. But somewhere along the way, somebody had the insight to say, "How do we intentionally bring these two groups together, because we have shared values between the two?" So they established a mentoring program where we have students that are involved with spending time with seniors, not because it's part of the class or that they have to do it but there are things that have been set up for them that they get insight into that they wouldn't normally get. And the seniors love it because they have so much wisdom to share. And so once we set up the right environment, it goes really well, and that's maybe a short example of how these two ministries are working well together that I wouldn't have necessarily expected.

Al: And you're right. On your campus—I mean, they're literally feet away from each other. And to see these high school kids in one of the best private high schools in the state right next to a senior living facility and seeing that interaction, that really is interesting and unusual at best, trying to bring those multiple generations together. Yeah, I love that idea. Hey, how about a good example of teams from one of CRISTA's seven ministries that you haven't mentioned yet?

Mike: Well, I will tell you that sometimes in the past, we would think of our seven ministries as really distinct. And so for something to be shared meant a serious loss on one side and a gain on the other. Even recently, Bob, he said, "You know, I'm really starting to think about maybe it's time to retire." And we said, "Okay, we're not sure we're ready for that, but we've been working on developing leaders, we've been working on succession plans as we look across all of our ministries." Sometimes it seemed hard on how would people go between ministries because they're so specialized.

But we did lay out very distinct, intentional development plans for a number of our leaders. We got to a point where one leader really started to stand out as someone that was able to take on more responsibility, was able to take on more complex roles. This person left one ministry to go work in another and then take on multiple ministries and so on and so forth. And as we launched externally a nationwide six-, seven-month search for a CEO, we identified 138 candidates that we narrowed down to 30 and then down to 11 and down to six. And I have to admit to you, as much as I really shouldn't talk about gambling, but I will; I would've said I would've laid money on the fact that we were going to go with an external candidate. And we just announced that the next CRISTA CEO and president is Jacinta Tegman, who had been the president at World Concern. Now, we all celebrate. We are so excited. And I've got to say, that is a real credit to her that she came out as the top candidate against so many very qualified, very good leaders from all over the industry, and one of the things that we started talking about is, man, is this a big loss for World Concern. And what I just offered up is it's really a gift from World Concern to the greater CRISTA, not one given out of abundance, but one that leaves a

leadership gap for them that we're going to fill. But it's part of how do you act as this family ministries and not see it as a loss somewhere but instead seeing it an overall gain.

Al: You know, Mike, we've just got a few minutes left, and I'm wondering if you can give us an example of where you've used the FLOURISH model to improve the health of your culture in ways maybe that you've never imagined as you kind of walked into this role. Where have you been surprised even by joy or even maybe had some fun with this as you've worked with it?

Mike: Yeah. You know, you used that word joy. It really sparks in me a devotion that we recently had. We have different leaders at CRISTA that will do a devotion weekly for us, and Katie, one of our leaders in World Concern, talked about the joy in waiting and especially around what was the Christmas season, so many people waiting for so long for something. And as I came into CRISTA, part of my background was, how do we measure success? How do we get things done? The success is in what is accomplished and what the outcome is. And I do believe that. But where is there joy in the waiting? Where is there joy in the process as well?

And as I talked to our leaders about taking the results that come back from our BCW survey, many of them wanted to stop with the result. That was the end product. And what I started talking to them about is, hey, instead of calling this the Best Christian Workplace Survey, what if we say that this is the CRISTA engagement survey, organized, led, and delivered by the Best Christian Workplaces Institute? I know you and I talked about that as well. And that this is the beginning of a conversation, not the end of one. So it's the beginning of a conversation that says, "Hey, here was our result. Let me ask you some more questions. Tell me some more what you mean by this. What do you think we should do?" Because we value relationship, it becomes a conversation. And so actually the process, there's joy in the process. There's joy in the engagement that we have before we get to the final action plan and get things done. And that's been fun, and that's been new for people who thought we were done when the results came through, or thought we were done when the plan was written. But there is real joy in the process where we actually grow in the process that can even supersede what we think we accomplish in the plan.

Al: You know, and that's really the purpose is a survey helps us identify kind of where we are, what the facts are, maybe where a couple of hotspots are in an organization, but then it's just the place to begin the conversation to go forward of, "Okay, let's just talk about what this is so that we can all get on the same page and move into a healthier spot."

Mike: Yes. In fact, I have to tell you. I joke with people that sometimes looking at the survey results is like playing hide and seek with my kids. They will never ever tell me exactly where somebody is hiding, but they'll tell me if I'm getting warm or where to go look some more. And so when I can see a hotspot, I know where to go look some more, because it gives me so much of an advantage than just starting with, "Hey, so how things are going." Now I know specifically where to start asking questions to look.

Al: You know, at the Best Christian Workplaces Institute, we believe a healthy culture is a true and worthy end of itself, and we also believe that a healthy to flourishing culture leads to organizational

growth and greater ministry impact, and we know that where things are healthy, they'll grow. So, how has improving the culture at CRISTA influenced overall ministry impact, Mike?

Mike: We started measuring things that we didn't realize we needed to measure before. So I'll give you a really quick example. As we started looking at our CRISTA Media, we were measuring, how many listeners are we reaching in Seattle? How are we doing with that population? And somebody said, "You know what? If our real goal is lives transformed, people reached, we need to look at where our streaming service is going." And this is just a quick example. But we started looking at where are people typing in or searching for or finding our streaming stations and listening to them all over the world. And we found that people are listening to our stations all over the world. And that has really changed the story of what we tell in CRISTA Media is that we are reaching the entire world with the gospel, not just the Seattle or the Boston area. And that's really changed even our own approach to, how should we be thinking about our ministry? How do we stop limiting or thinking God is just here? I think the second quick thing I'll say is we used to say we're going to bring Jesus to the end of the road. We're going to bring Jesus—and somebody said, "You know what? He's already there. And so how do we meet him there?" And that's also changed the way we do business. We're not taking something somewhere; we're going and meeting Him there and following through on what plans He's laid out for us to do.

Al: Yeah. And it's amazing what media can do and where it takes us these days and how things have changed and what we measure then as a result.

Mike: Yes.

Al: And make sure we're measuring the right thing. So, Mike, we've certainly enjoyed all that we've learned today from our conversation. It's been a wide-ranging conversation and one I've enjoyed very much, so thank you very much.

Mike: Yeah. Thank you.

Al: But let me ask you one final question. Given how far the staff culture CRISTA has grown by using the FLOURISH model and just measuring staff engagement as we've now discussed—it's called the CRISTA Engagement Survey—give us one final thought that you'd like to leave with ministry leaders.

Mike: You know, Al, that's an important question and my answer I don't think is just specific to ministry leaders, but I'll talk to ministry leaders out there. When I look at the example of how did Jesus start His ministry, He started it with relationships; with one on one; I know you, you know me; let's talk about where we're going, what we're doing. And I know we get tempted as we get into—I mean, we're over \$100 million organization, 2,000 people, 27 countries. It's easy to talk about what's scalable, what reaches people, what's portable, what can go from one place to another. But it all has to come back to starting with the relationships that we have with each other. And so if those aren't strong, if we aren't knowing each other, allowing ourselves to be known, it's really difficult to reach people at their heart, to inspire them of what our mission is, to inspire them of, "Hey, when you're not around, I have the same values you do, and I don't need to come back and ask you what to do because I know what to

do based on what you've taught me or what I've learned from our relationship and our connection together." So anything that helps us with that is really important.

And so as people might be listening in their car, might be listening at their desk, and they're thinking about the tens, hundreds of people they're trying to reach, I would just recommend thinking about that first person you talk to. Whatever that interaction is like, it's going to multiply. It's going to ripple. You have a further reach than you realize simply through the relationships that we all have with one another.

Al: And the quality of those relationships—

Mike: Absolutely.

Al: —is so important, isn't it. Yeah. Well, Mike Cole, senior vice president of human resources and the chief people officer at CRISTA Ministries in the Seattle area and with ministries around the world, thank you for sharing your wisdom, insight, 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.

Mike: Thanks, Al. Should we do it again next week?

Al: Okay, let's go, yeah.

Mike: I think the people would probably not want to hear that, but that's all right.

Al: We'll do it again, though.

To our listeners, I want to thank you for listening to the Flourishing Culture Podcast and for investing this time in your workplace culture today. If there's a specific insight, a story, an action step—and Mike has talked about several—and if there are any that you've enjoyed in these past few minutes, please share them with others so that they can benefit as well. And please, review the show wherever you listen to podcasts.

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