

Doug Smith ([00:00:00](#)):

Hey leader, and welcome to episode number 313 of the L3 Leadership podcast, where we are obsessed with helping you grow to your maximum potential and to maximize the impact of your leadership. My name is Doug Smith and I am your host and today's episode is brought to you by my friends at Beratung Advisors. If you're new to the podcast. Welcome. I'm so glad that you're here. And I hope up that you enjoy our content and become a subscriber, know that you can also watch all of our conversations over on YouTube as well. So make sure you subscribe to our YouTube channel. And if you've been watching or listening to the podcast for a while, just know that it would mean the world to me. If you'd leave us a rating and review on how the podcast has impacted your life, whether that's on apple podcast or a Spotify or whatever app you listen to podcast you, that really does help us to grow our audience and reach more leaders.

Doug Smith ([00:00:44](#)):

So thank you in advance for that. Well, in today's episode, you'll hear my conversation with Phile Cooke. I've been following Phil's work for well over a decade. So it was great to be able to sit down and have a conversation with him. If you're unfamiliar with Phil. Let me just tell you a little bit about him. Phile Cooke works at the intersection of faith, media and co, and he's pretty rare. He's a working producer in hollywood with a PhD in theology. His client list includes studios and networks like Walt Disney, Dreamworks and USA network, as well as major Christian organizations from Joel Ostein. Joyce Meyer, the museum of the Bible, the salvation army, the U version Bible app, and many more he's produced TV and, and film programming in more than 60 countries around the world. And in the process he has been shot at.

Doug Smith ([00:01:26](#)):

He survived two military coops, fallen out of a helicopter. And in Africa, he was threatened with prison. During that time though, his company Cooke Media Group in Los Angeles, California has helped some of the largest Christian and nonprofit organizations in the world use the media to tell their story in a changing it culture. Phil was executive producer of let hope rise. The Hillsong movie released a theaters nationwide and producer of the insanity of God, a feature documentary that premiered nationally as a fathom event. According to former CNN journalist Paulison Phil is a rare working producer in Hollywood with a PhD in theology. He's appeared in NBC MSNBC, CNBC, CNN, Fox news, and his work has been profiled in the New York times, Los Angeles times, and the wall street journal he's lectured at universities like Yale, the university of California at Berkeley UCLA, and is currently a visiting professor at Oral Roberts university in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Doug Smith ([00:02:19](#)):

In addition to, to writing his blog at philcooke.com he's to the Huffington post fastcompany, forbes.com, wire.com and Foxnews.com. Phil is on the advisory board for the salvation army, a board member of the image journal and the Hollywood prayer network. It has been long time member of the academy of television arts and sciences and the producers guilt of America and Hollywood, his philosophy, get your ideas out out there and change the world in the process. Well, that is an incredible bio and it was an incredible conversation. You'll hear Phil and I talk about maximizing your organization's influence, which clearly he has demonstrated throughout his career, that he has the ability to help you do that. Leading creatives, which is a huge thing for leaders, how to become a content machine. And of course we take 'em through the lightning round and talk through so many more things.

Doug Smith ([00:03:04](#)):

You're gonna love this conversation, but before we get into it, just a few announcements. This episode of the L3 Leadership podcast is sponsored by Beratung advisors, the financial advisors at Beratung advisors, help educate and empower clients to make informed show decisions. You can find out how Beratung Advisors can help you develop a customized financial plan for your financial future by visiting their website@beratungadvisors.com. That's beratungadvisors.com securities and investment products and services offered through LPL financial member, FINRA, and S I P C Beratung Advisor, LPL financial and L3 Leadership are separate entities. I also want to thank our sponsor Henne Jewelers they're jeweler owned by my friend and mentor John Henne. And my wife, Laura, and I got our engagement and wedding rings through Henne Jewelers and had an amazing experience. And not only do they have great jewelry, but they also invest in people. In fact, for every couple that gets engaged and comes into their store, they give them a book to help them prepare for their marriage. And we just love that. So if you're in need of a good jeweler, check out, hennejewelers.com. And with all that being said, here's my conversation with Phile Cooke.

Doug Smith ([00:04:16](#)):

Well, Hey, Phil it's such an honor to be able to, to interview you. I just was just mentioning to you before we hit record that I've been following your work for well over a decade when I used to be on staff at a church and have continued to follow now that I'm on staff at a rescue mission, and you have quite a resume you know, you've been a producer, that's worked with Disney Dreamworks, Joel Ostein, Joyce Meyer, the museum of the Bible, the You Version Bible app. You have your fingerprints on a lot of big things. Give us a little backer on the story of that. What, what's your background on how you got into producing and how you got to be a part of so many cool things?

Phil Cooke ([00:04:47](#)):

Well I started in high school actually. I, I used to make movies with my dad's super eight movie camera. I didn't know what I was doing, but I had a group of friends in high school that loved to make army movies, mafia, movies, space, movies, whatever we little, three minute reels on my dad's super eight camera. That's how old I am. And never thought about doing it for a living, but I went to college and I thought, well, maybe I'll stop. Find some buddies in college. That'll wanna make these little movies. So I took my camera, took my reels with me. And literally the first day I was unpacking my suitcase. A bunch of the film reels fell outta my suitcase and a guy acrossed the hall. I'll never forget said how I can show you how to edit those.

Phil Cooke ([00:05:24](#)):

I'm taking a film class. So that night we literally went down to the film department, stayed up late, cutting my film, working on it. And the professor happened to be there. And as he was leaving about midnight, he was leaving and stopped by and introduced himself and said, you know, I've been watching your little film outta the corner of my eye. And he said, it's better than most of what my students are doing. He said, would you mind if I showed it in my class tomorrow? So I said, yeah. And if I can sit on the back row. So the next day, literally he, as a freshman, I came in, sat on the back row. He showed my movie to the class. And it was nothing great. Trust me, it was nothing to scream about, but when it was over, they talked about it, they discussed it. And Hmm, I had this crystal clear moment of revelation. I mean, this thing hit me like a ton of bricks that if I could do something with a camera that makes people talk like this, that's what I'm supposed to do with my life. Wow. And so literally that day, I, I changed my major. I was do what,

Doug Smith ([00:06:15](#)):

How old were you?

Phil Cooke ([00:06:17](#)):

Oh, I was a freshman in college. Wow. Freshman in college and literally changed my major that day. I was a preacher's kid. So I'd signed up to be a music major cuz that's, that was the job description at the time. And I changed my major to film in television and I've literally never looked back.

Doug Smith ([00:06:31](#)):

Wow. curious with that. You, you have a book called, I think it's called one thing. And it's all about finding your, your calling. You found it very, very, yeah. I, I am curious, you know, what would your advice be to people to finding what they're called to do for the rest of their life? I, I think a lot of people would love to have that experience where it's like, Hey, I never have to look back. I never have to wonder what I'm called to do. I just get to do what I love every day. Any advice there?

Phil Cooke ([00:06:55](#)):

Yeah. You know, I meet people in their seventies that tell me, you know, of Phil, I've been successful. I've worked on my life, but I've never really felt like I knew I was doing what I was really born to do. And when I wrote the book, one big thing, I, I saw so many people that struggle. And I realized from my work with nonprofit organizations, churches, ministry, outreaches, that you know, the ones that get noticed, aren't the ones that are pretty good at a lot of things. That ones who are extraordinary at one big thing. And I realized that translated to people is careers. Most of the people I meet would tell me, Phil, you know, I'm, I'm pretty good at a lot of stuff, but very few I meet are really extraordinary at one thing. And one of the things I always recommend to people start with what you were good at.

Phil Cooke ([00:07:35](#)):

I'm not a believer in passion. So many people to me and say, Phil, I'm passionate about this, or I'm passionate about that. But the truth is, they're just not very good at it. I get screenplay sent to me all the time by writers who say, Phil, I'm so passionate about writing, but it doesn't take many pages in before I realize. Yeah. But they're really a terrible writer. My advice is, figure out what you were wired to do. What were you extraordinary at? What did know throughout your life? Remembering the, the high school homecoming committee. I sat on the homecoming committee and you, you sit around and people say, well, Bob, you're good with numbers. Why don't you do the budget, Susan? You're good in front of people. Why don't you be the host Jack? You're, you're really creative. Why don't you come up with a theme?

Phil Cooke ([00:08:14](#)):

It's funny that other people notice what we're kind of wired to do even before we do so. Well, look back over your life. I I've, I did some, I directed some programs for ESPN years ago and I would have athletes tell me, you know, I was always the guy that could catch the ball in my neighborhood, but nobody else can, could or I was the fastest guy or, you know, I was just really big. So find the things you were wired to do. What are you naturally really good at? That's usually the first step in deciding and what you were really born to do.

Doug Smith ([00:08:43](#)):

Yeah. And, and talk to the person, you, you know, you talked about how everyone says, I'm a good writer. Then they give you the manuscript and three pages and you're done. Yep. Talk to that person. Cause I think there's a lot of people in that category that, that want to do something, you know, how do you know if, if you truly are meant to do something, you know, obviously you have to get good at something. I, I would, what would be your advice for that person who maybe they don't have it yet, but if they kept going and didn't quit, maybe they would get there or, you know, what are your thoughts on that process?

Phil Cooke ([00:09:09](#)):

Very often, you know, it's something that we have to like for in my career. I, I wanted to be a direct so bad. I couldn't stand it. I studied directing. I, I filmed in about 70 countries around the world over the years. I've got books on directing in the lives of great directors, but I was doing a massive project in Vancouver. One time, a, a short film for the largest advertising agency in the world, dramatic thing. It was a huge complex, big budget project. And about halfway through, I realized I'm just not getting what I want outta the actors. And I I'm, I'd hit a wall in some way. And it really shocked me because I was pretty good at directing. I've got a bunch of awards for it, but once I really thought about it and spent really, really spent some time thinking about it, I realized I kind of hit my wall, hit my ceiling, if you will, as a director.

Phil Cooke ([00:09:54](#)):

And when I about it more, I realize, but most of the projects I've done, I've written because I couldn't afford a writer. And most of 'em I produced because I couldn't afford a producer. And I started thinking more that wait a second, writing and producing is really what I'm great at. I'm great at finding the project, bringing the together, the team kind of supervising the whole thing, writing the project. And like you say, it's something that I, I still struggle with. I work hard at every day, but I love it. I feel great doing it. It's something that I can't do it enough. I would do it for free. That there's no question about that. I love it so much. So very often, it's not the thing that you're most excited about early on, but it's the thing you just feel really great about doing.

Phil Cooke ([00:10:35](#)):

It's the thing I, I, I remember I was working on a project in Italy late at night. It's like at three in the morning, pouring down rain, driving rainstorm, freezing cold, standing on this hillside, we're filming a scene. And I realized at that moment I was absolutely miserable, but I was having the time of my life. And, and I, I, the thought occurred to me, you know, this is what I was really born to do. I love being here at this moment. So finding that thing where you really feel like you're contributing, you're making a difference. And yet you feel confident in your ability to do it is really key, even though you need to continue learning and growing for the rest of your life. I think it's important to know that, that you feel confident enough that this may be the thing you were called and born to do.

Doug Smith ([00:11:15](#)):

That's so good. You talked about your passion for writing. You have a book coming out in may called ideas on a deadline. Yeah. And, and talking to creatives. I, I want, I want you to talk about the book, but you know, I look at, I've been following you for, you know, 13, 14 years. You have a blog, you blog consistently, you have a podcast, you are a content machine, which is one of my goals this year is to become a content machine. How do you produce so much content? And, and what advice would you

have for those who in the, the world we live in have to, or need to produce a lot of content to build their platform?

Phil Cooke ([00:11:47](#)):

Well, I'm a ferocious reader. I I'm constantly reading. I, if you saw my office, I have a huge library really huge library. My dad was a pastor. He had two PhDs. He had a huge library himself, and I really grew up in that library. I grew up surrounded by books and it really gave me a hunger for reading. And I, I think the thing I recommend the most is, you know, I, I talked to Jim Krueger the other day on my podcast. Who's a, a comic writer. He writes for Marvel comics. He writes for DC and he said, read something every day, watch something every day and write something every day or create something every day, if you're a filmmaker or a musician or an artist or whatever you do. And, and I think that's a really great rule, read something every day, write something every day, do something day, what, whatever it is that you're good at doing, I think that's really important and watch something every day. So I try, I, you know, I've got my Netflix cranking, my Amazon cranking. I like to watch current things that are going on, but I'm also a really voracious reader. And I think it's creative people. We need to be up on what people are doing. We need to see what's happening in the world. Because if we wanna speak the language of the culture, we need to be you up to date and know what language people are speaking these days. And I think that's really, really critical.

Doug Smith ([00:12:59](#)):

And so the whole concept of ideas on a deadline, why, why did you write this book and what do you want leaders to get out of it and creatives?

Phil Cooke ([00:13:05](#)):

Well, I two things, I discovered, number one, that most people, you know, there's a huge number of people out there that just think they weren't born creative. Let me just say, encourage anybody watching or listening right now that there is not a shred of evidence that says some of us were born creative and some of us weren't the truth is we are all born wildly creative, put a bunch of toddlers in a room. You know, you're never gonna look at that. One of those guys and say, Hey, he's gonna be an accountant. He's not creative at all. Little kids are all wildly creative. Yet we grow up and we start losing that muscle. We start stop using it. We stop being creative. It's a, it's a choice we make not something we're born into. So number one, I wrote the book because I want everyone to know whether you're a creative person or whether you're a real estate agent or a coach or a teacher.

Phil Cooke ([00:13:46](#)):

Everybody can be more creative in their life. And the second reason is most people think creative ideas just come to us at random. You know, if I sit on the back ports, the creative fire will fall from heaven or these will hit. But the truth is I've lived my whole life under deadlines. I I'm, I'm a television cruiser. So every week I've gotta hit a target. I've gotta hit a deadline. I've produced super bowl commercials. I learned pretty quickly that the super bowl is not gonna delay their date because I can't come up with a good idea for my commercial. So, oh, over the years I've learned techniques and I've studied research that really opens us up to being able to produce breakthrough ideas at the moment we need the most. And that's really why I wrote the book, cuz I want people to understand that you can come up with great ideas. You can come up with amazing thoughts and ideas and, and, and create, create stuff just on a deadline. You know, when, when the pressure is on when you have no way out, there's a way to do it. And I think that's the heart of the book. And that's, I think so important for people that are creative and

it's important for people that really in my mind, creativity is about solving problems. We all solve problems for a living. So being able to do it under pressure, I think is really important.

Doug Smith ([00:14:54](#)):

Yeah. And along those lines, you had, you had an interesting section in the book that I wanna ask you about and just ask you how you do this personally, but it's about saying no. You know, I'm an idea person. I think about our marketing communication team at the mission, you know, any, anything, any new idea, bright and show I'm like, let's do it. Let's do it. I never think about the capacity of the team, which I've learned to. I mean, I became self aware or they made me aware of that. But how do you learn what say no to and what say yes to when it comes to its creative ideas.

Phil Cooke ([00:15:23](#)):

And it's funny, a network TV writer invited me over to his office. One day here in Hollywood, I went to the studio, went to his office and his frustration was he really struggles to get all this creative work done during the day. He, he said, you know, Phil, I don't, I can't hit my deadlines with the scripts. I'm struggling. I just don't have enough hours in the day to do it. And, and I, I just needed to know some answers, but as I sat with him, it was interesting that he kept the door open and like six or eight times in the hour, I was with him. People just pop in, Hey, how are you, man? What's going on? You want me to get you some coffee? Things like that. The guy was interrupted like every five to 10 minutes simply because he kept his office door open.

Phil Cooke ([00:16:00](#)):

He always said yes to people when people would look in and say, Bob, can you get that file for me or Sam? What was that? You know, that, that, that article I needed from a couple weeks ago, he'd always volunteered to do it. And I learned, he can't say he couldn't say no to anything. And so his day was literally filled up with stuff he was doing for other people. And I've discovered early on that, that for instance, with email, if you're constantly spending your day answering email, the chances are you're spending your day responding to other people's priorities. And I've learned that if you don't say no, occasionally then you're yes. Means nothing. So the important thing to understand is if you've been called to do something significant, if you feel like your life matters and you're working on a big project, you have to say no to a lot of things that will free up that time, that will allow you to do it.

Phil Cooke ([00:16:46](#)):

And the thing is in my book, I have, I listed a whole bunch of ways to say, no, you don't have to be a jerk. You know, you be nice, you can be gracious. And I think it's important to realize that, and I give you some options in the book about how to do that. But until we learn to say, no, most of us think we'll get shot. If we say no <laugh>, but the truth is saying no is incredibly important. And unless we can do that, we're never gonna open up our lives to have the amount of time we need to accomplish things that are really important to us.

Doug Smith ([00:17:14](#)):

You know, you talked about not checking email. Do you have any, any systems or boundaries in your life on a weekly basis that enable you to be creative, creative? Like I only check email once a day or, Hey, do you block out six hours every morning to write? I'd just be curious how, how you live your life. That way

Phil Cooke ([00:17:29](#)):

It's a struggle I will die with. I'll tell you that. I, I've tried every single program concept strategy technique out there. And part of the problem is I'm in the service business. So we, you know, we're client driven, we are client driven. Our, our team at cook media group is client driven. And while we do a lot of films and projects and I write books and things on our own, we're all so client driven and I wanna be available to those clients. And that's the way a lot of people are. They may not have clients, but they've got a boss. And so it's not like I can just shut things down and say, I'm gonna answer my email twice a day. That's just really impossible for me because I need to address issues as they come up. I have learned that if we don't, I've turned off all my notifications, I don't get notified for anything.

Phil Cooke ([00:18:15](#)):

I just go in every once in a while, periodically during the day and check things and see how they're doing. I think we just have to have a personal discipline. I think a big part of it is I've you know, the, a big thing that's helped me is search has become rate with email these days, whether you use apple mail or outlook or other programs, searches become so fantastic that in the old days we'd have 60 or 70 folders, email folders, remember <laugh> and now I've cut those back to about five. We just don't need to, I, I think it takes more time to use different folders to try to find that document we were looking for than it would be just to for it. So I've learned some little techniques and secrets like that, but I think the important thing is be intentional.

Phil Cooke ([00:18:55](#)):

We really have to be intentional because I wanna focus. I two things I would say really quickly that are important is number one, find the time of day your most productive in you know, we, we all operate on circadian rhythm. We have cycles. Some of us are our, at our best in the morning, some in the afternoon, some late at night and some keep rockstar hours. Me I'm best from 6:00 AM to noon. I can write like a, a madman. I can create ideas. I can come up with great stuff in the morning, but in the afternoon or evening, I'm pretty worthless. I can travel, I can do meetings and phone calls and things like that. Even speak at conferences. But when comes to coming up with creative stuff, I need to do it in the morning. So I block out as much of that time as possible, because I think that's really increased my productivity. And some people have day jobs. They can't totally block out the time of day they're best at. But, you know, in my case, I was working full time when I discovered this and I just started coming in on two hours early. I would come in at six in the morning before everybody came in at eight. And I wrote my first two books from six to six to eight in the morning during those two hours, because I was so much more productive. So figure that out. And it'll be a big step for most people.

Doug Smith ([00:20:03](#)):

Yeah. I wanted to get this later, but since you mentioned it, you've read several books. What advice do you have for aspiring authors?

Phil Cooke ([00:20:10](#)):

Write! I think the thing that I find with most writers is they'll, I'll, I'll ask 'em, you know, what do you, what do you do? And well, I wanna be a writer. Well, have you published anything? No. Have you written anything? Well, no. I'm waiting to meet an agent. I'm waiting to meet a publisher. I'm waiting to be a producer, meet a producer. I'll tell you, you just have to be doing it. You have to be doing it. So my big, my big advice for all writers is do it and do it every day. Come up with a system, come up with a place you work best, come up with a time of day. You work best, get the tools around you, eliminate the distractions in your life, put the phone away and really focus. We're never gonna write. If we just wanna

be a writer, we have to actually sit down and do it. And, and very often I sit down and I don't, I don't have anything great to say. So I'll just write something trivial that just get, gets the pump going. And once that pump gets going, I delete that document. And I started on my book or I started on that presentation or that script. That's what really, I think it takes to, to really be a writer, get out there and actually start writing.

Doug Smith ([00:21:13](#)):

Yeah. And then on the other end of writing, you know, you publish a book, but now we live in a world where, you know, there's millions and millions and millions of books. There's a lot of focus on building platform and then the need to have a platform. I remember talking to an agent and he's like, Hey, if you don't have an email of 25,000 people, you know, we're not interested in talking to you. What advice do you have for people when it come and leaders, when it comes to, to developing their platform in today's world, you wrote an excellent book that, you know, I wanna dive into called maximize your influence, which I encourage all leaders to get. But what advice, this is, what you do, you help people get their message out there.

Phil Cooke ([00:21:45](#)):

Yeah. I do a big part of what we do is it with leaders to help them get their message out there. And, and, and very often books are a key to that. But platforms are really critical. I mean, we live in a, a world today. Social media has created a world where the, the largest industry on the planet is now the self-promotion industry. I mean, you've got six year old kids that are making 12, 13, 15 million a year on, on YouTube. We have adults making 30, 40 million a year. We have people with million, you know, tens of millions of subscribers and followers. So it's an, the, the platform situation has changed everything out there. In fact, as you said, many publishers, traditional publishers don't even want you to publish a book unless you have a huge already. In fact, my daughter and son-in-law are both actors here in Hollywood, and she lost a commercial recently to an actress who PR I don't know if she was better than my daughter, but she had more social media followers.

Phil Cooke ([00:22:39](#)):

And that's a big thing because the company wants to promote their stuff on social media. So platforms have become critical and, and my feeling is take it, you know, some people use their social media, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, other things just for fun. And that's okay, but you can use your social media flat platforms to really tell the world who you are, what your expertise is and why they need to pay attention and follow you. And I think that's a powerful tool. It's free. It doesn't cost anything in building up your social media following can be such an important way to get books done, to be invited, to speak at conferences, to be, you know, sought out by clients and other people. It's just really, really important. And so it's not life and death, you know, you don't have to, if you're, you just don't feel comfortable with it. But I do think we live in a world where getting your story out there via social media has become absolutely critical. And I would encourage people to, to, to take it to the next level, get serious about it. Be intentional. I think that's so, so important.

Doug Smith ([00:23:39](#)):

Yeah. And you talk about this in the book, but I'm, I'm curious your advice, you know, should people, people may say that I don't know what to do. Would you encourage people to hire a brand manager or outsource their social media, or is that something they should do personally and learn how to do it?

Phil Cooke ([00:23:51](#)):

We do that with a lot of clients. It's both ways in my case, I enjoy doing it. I enjoy doing it now. I, I, you know, if people, as a result of this podcast decide to follow me, just understand Instagram is my playground, just art, everything I say, when it comes to my Instagram feed at, at Phil Cooke I, I just have fun with it and I go kind of crazy with it. But the important thing to understand is if you enjoy doing it great if, if it's better to hire somebody, bring them on, particularly if you're a executive level, a pastor, a ministry leader, something, you know, if you have a high level leadership role, I would encourage you to at least talk to a branding expert, talk to a social media person, get their insight on what you should do, because it really is important.

Phil Cooke ([00:24:34](#)):

It's funny that big companies, big organizations, nonprofits, even churches, you know, they, they don't think twice about having an accountant on a retainer, monthly retainer or an attorney, a on a monthly retainer, but they never think about having a communications professional on a monthly retainer. We live today in a world where the average person sees about 10,000 media messages every single day. We, I, I saw a statistic the other day that the average person touches their iPhone 250 times a day. So in that world, it becomes vitally important to be able to speak into that and speak that language. So I would encourage leaders get that kind of advice from people who are expert experts. We do it with clients, others do it with clients. And so it's just really important to get people's opinion about how you should be presenting yourself, what you should say. For instance, I'll give you a tip. I think one of the biggest reasons people follow you on social media is because they to know what it's like to be you. If you're the president of an organization or a manager or a nonprofit leader of any kind, people love to know what that's like, show a glimpse of what your life is behind the scenes. People love that. So little tricks like that little ideas can be really influential in helping you grow your social media following.

Doug Smith ([00:25:45](#)):

Yeah. You talked about organizations and you talked about this in the book and it's something I've been thinking about recently. I was actually, I was about what positions organizations need to hire to grow their influence. And I was meeting with a leader recently and he said, you know, in the business world, they don't blink twice about having a research and development department, but that's almost unheard of, of in churches and nonprofits. And I'm just curious you, in your opinion, what positions do you consider vital for organizations to organize their and maximize their influence? You know, do they need a PR department and development? What do they need?

Phil Cooke ([00:26:18](#)):

That's a great point. I always tell churches, ministries, nonprofit organizations, one of the first people you need to hire as a communications person communications director, I find in many of the most if effective churches in the country, the communications role, that communications director is one of the closest people to the pastor or, or ministry or nonprofit leader. Because they have to, you know, a pastor will get up on Sunday and preach to a congregation, but that communications director job is to get it not only to the congregation, but way beyond the walls of that church. So media communications is a really important thing. And your point about research departments is really, really true. I also think you need to have a team. If you can possibly afford this, you need a team on, on, on, in your organization that they do nothing that the are trying out new things.

Phil Cooke ([00:27:04](#)):

They're failing regularly. They're, they're trying stuff that nobody's tried before. I wanna see 'em pushing the envelope. It's, it's really ingrained in our team here at cook media group. And we work with churches and nonprofits and ministry organizations that have that kind of little R and D team. And they're just trying, okay, what apps could be better for us? What should we be looking at? How we get our message out in a bigger way? What are the ways that, you know, we could expand beyond the walls of this organization that is important. So, you know, you need to have a team that has the permission to fail, has the permission to try new things. It's not a big budget thing. They're not, you know, they don't have to be buying a lot of equipment and gear and things like that, but they need to be trying new apps, new platforms, experimenting to see what could work. I just don't think we do enough of that experimentation. We know in the corporate world that many of the biggest, most popular products were created in an R and D room. So why wouldn't that work in a, a Christian setting or in a church or synagogue or temple? There's just so many ways that if we could get that R and D thinking into, we could create new things that we've never dreamed before.

Doug Smith ([00:28:07](#)):

That's so good. And you talked about the, the leader being close closest to the communications chapter. Yeah. And in the book, I love this. You add, you add a list of 10 reasons. You're not ready to lead creatives. And I would say, you know, I've seen the tension between, you know, leaders of organizations trying to connect with creatives. What advice you have of leaders listening to this on? Okay, now you have creatives in leadership positions or on your team. How the heck do you lead these people and, and get along?

Phil Cooke ([00:28:32](#)):

That's a great question. And the truth is creative. People are a little different from the accounting staff. They're little bit different from, you know, the, the, the manufacturing team. They're a little different, different from the guys in the loading dock. They just think differently. And that's what may make some special. So it's not like hurting cats. It's like hurting, really hurting tigers. Cuz the potential of a creative team is really amazing. A couple of the things that I would suggest is, you know, create a stable situation for them. One thing I find is leaders very often will threaten their creative team with, Hey, if this new logo design doesn't work, we're at a business or if this new present doesn't go over, well, we're gonna be in trouble that does not create an environment for coming up with breakthrough ideas. You, you need to give 'em a certain amount of stability so they can be wildly creative and risky in their thinking.

Phil Cooke ([00:29:19](#)):

So don't, don't ever threaten creative people that, you know, look, everything rests on this new idea. That's just not an attitude you want the them to have. It's not really important. Another thing I would say is, you know, do give them deadlines dirty little secret. I can tell you I'll share for from creative people is we love deadlines. I, I honestly, I don't even start a project till I see the deadline approaching in the distance. I talk to a, a, a airline pilot recently and he said, I'll tell you, there's something about seeing the end of the runway approaching when I'm taking off. That gets my blood really pumping and I'm the same way with deadlines. I think that that deadlines are important because they do give you a map. We know I have to have that idea by then. I can start planning my research.

Phil Cooke ([00:29:59](#)):

I can just start my writing, schedule my work schedule around that. So don't be afraid to give creative people deadlines because they actually really thrive on those. And I think it's important. Another thing I

I'd suggest is give 'em a little flexibility. I've worked with creative people that you know, are amazing from midnight to 6:00 AM. Okay. Let's let 'em do that. Let's let 'em, you know, with my team, I don't worry when they come into work, I just worry that they're gonna do the job. I make sure they deliver on the deadline, but when they do it, how they do it, I really don't care. So I, I think the pandemic has really opened that up for a lot of people, you know, before the pandemic, a lot of people were locked into eight to five, nine to six, whatever the, the work hours were and everybody had to fit into that mold.

Phil Cooke ([00:30:44](#)):

But since so many people have started working from home, I think we we've had the freedom to see that some people are amazing early, early in the morning, I talked to a girl yesterday who starts writing at 4:00 AM every day. And but by 10 or 11, she's done. So we have to be flexible with creative people because I think, you know, those circ and rhythms, again, they start working with us and there's certain times of day, we're amazing at and other times of day, we're just not terribly productive. So tap into that and it can change everything.

Doug Smith ([00:31:12](#)):

And, and on the other side, flipping roles, what advice do you have for creatives when it comes to leading up to a leader who, you know, may not understand their creative world?

Phil Cooke ([00:31:22](#)):

Well, let me tell you a lot of creative people will face that I certainly did early in my career when I had a creative, I, I had a, a boss that was leading our team that just was the least creative person I'd ever met. <Laugh> and he didn't like creative people. He was just not open to this stuff at all. And so one of the things I learned was start making in incremental changes that maybe he would not notice. I, I don't wanna be disrespectful by any means and don't want you to be disrespectful. But the truth is leading from the middle is a real art form. And I learned early on in that job I had in my twenties that even though I wasn't the boss, suddenly I would start just start making some changes, start being intentional about things doing things that were kind of under and before long, I noticed people started coming to me for decisions.

Phil Cooke ([00:32:07](#)):

They started coming to me for advice and they completely ignored him when it came to real creative stuff. And so after a while that really picks up momentum. So start where you can influence the people below you influence the people around you, and it will start influencing the people above you and, you know, always be gracious. It not doesn't hurt to alienate that boss, even if he or she is a jerk, it doesn't hurt to alienate that person do what you can to make peace with them and work, you know, work well with them. But the truth is if you're stuck in a place where they won't let you do your thing, won't let you really exercise your creativity. It may be time to move on if you can stay there and influence, you know, up as you say that can be a positive thing. But if not, there comes a time when I think we really need to decide, you know, am I gonna stay here where I'm tolerated? Or should I go someplace where I'm celebrated, that can make a huge difference in your creativity.

Doug Smith ([00:33:04](#)):

Yeah. Such great insight. I have a few friends that are leaders that I'm sure will listen to this episode. And they run their own production companies, which I, I know you run your own. I'm curious, what advice specifically for them, what advice would you have to someone who just launched a production company

maybe there a few years and you know, what advice would you give them to build and scale their company and get more clients? And, you know, obviously you've worked your way up and gotten to work with some of the, the world's greatest companies. I'm just curious how you did that.

Phil Cooke ([00:33:32](#)):

Well, I'm a big believer in freelancing. I, I, I, I hire, we have a very small core core team on here at cook media group. We freelance most of the big jobs that we have. So I have three or four directors of photography that I work with around the country. I have three or four other writers I work with around the country. And it, it, for a couple of reasons, you know, number one, every job requires different types of equipment and gear. You know, I don't use the same camera for every job I do. It just depends on the type of shooting I'm gonna be filming. Am I gonna be in the desert Ethiopia? Or am I gonna be in an office suite in Oslo, Norway. It all depends on what I'm gonna be doing. And so I wanna have, I don't wanna buy a bunch of stuff that I end up not using half the time.

Phil Cooke ([00:34:14](#)):

So I'm really, I would rather, and the, also the other thing is most particular startups can't afford to hire the best people full time, but you can afford to hire amazing people if you freelance that for that project. So don't, don't feel like you have to staff up. I, a big mistake I see with a lot of production company leaders is we have to staff up. We have, have to have to have a big team, but let me tell you open up your, your contacts start using freelance people and can make a dramatic difference for you. Also, you're not carrying that financial load all the time. So that really, really helps. Another thing I would say is be really careful who you do pick to be on your core team. Chemistry really matters. I I've gotten to, you know, we've gotten a, a core team so that we're, we're on a set filming.

Phil Cooke ([00:34:57](#)):

I hardly have to talk. I can just grunt and they know what I want. You get to that level and it's really amazingly liberating. And so get that core team that the chemistry really works. You know, there's that, that famous illustration of you gotta get the right PE people on the bus, you gotta get the right people in the right seats on the bus, and then you get the wrong people off the bus. And I think one of the important things to learn early on as a leader is learn how to let people go learn how to fire people, because some people are just not gonna make a difference for you. And I think one of the hardest things we do as leaders is fire people. And I don't believe, you know, I don't believe in kicking people to the curb, but let me tell you something.

Phil Cooke ([00:35:35](#)):

If I think it was Jack Welch who, when he was CEO at GE, he said, if you're not firing, if you're keeping an underperforming employee, you're not just hurting the company, you're hurting them because you're lying to them. You're letting them believe that they're being successful. So when you have that kind of person, get him out of there and get him plugged or her and plugged into a place where they can actually Excel and do well. So I, I'm a big ad advocate of firing the RO the wrong people, getting, getting, or I should say, firing the right people and getting them off the bus and getting them plugged into some place in your company or somewhere else where they can really be successful. And that really makes a difference in the construction and the chemistry of your team.

Doug Smith ([00:36:17](#)):

Yeah. Talk to leaders about crisis management. When it comes from a, a public relations standpoint, you know, we live in a world where, you know, one tweet can all of a sudden cause a major crisis for an organization. What, what should leaders know and be prepared for to adequately prepare for crisis?

Phil Cooke ([00:36:35](#)):

You know, it's not, it's not when the crisis, it's not, if a crisis will happen, it's when the crisis will happen. We just live in this, this digital, social media world, where word travels fast. I mean, in an instant message world, you just can't hide anymore. And one thing I would say is we need to live transparent lives as leaders. We just can't hide. I mean, I'm amazed at the number of high profile CEOs, pastors leaders who still get caught in adultery, who still go off the rails morally, or have some kind of a problem. And they actually thought they could keep that under wraps, but you know what? You have a, you, you have a fender bender out on the street in your car. The minute you get outta the car, chances are somebody in the curb is making a video with their phone.

Phil Cooke ([00:37:16](#)):

You just can't hide. I actually had pastor one time tell me, you know, Phil, it would probably be best if you didn't tell my congregation about my yacht. And I said, well, you know, you're an idiot. I said, number one, if they got Google, they can download the title of the yacht. And if they've got Google earth, they can download a, a satellite photo of the boat sitting at the dock. We just can't hide. So we need as leaders to be more transparent. And that it goes in your email communication. It goes in your social media your search history, all those kind of things are gonna come up. And so we have to really think a lot about how we do that. And, and part of it, you know, is, is be careful what you say on, on emails. Don't fire people through emails, don't criticize people through emails.

Phil Cooke ([00:37:58](#)):

I have an awesome an accountant. And whenever I ask my accountant a financial question, he'll always respond. I'll email him. He'll always respond with, give me a call. We'll talk about it. He knows that there are things you wanna put in email and the things you don't. It's true with so much of policy and things that you do around your company, but a big part of all this is you know, as will happen. And we just have to be really sensitive to that and be responsible. Don't be so quick to pull the trigger on that social media response. I'm, I'm guilty of this as anybody. When you know, I'll be looking through my Twitter stream and somebody will say something that really gets me worked up and I just wanna, you know, reach out and blast them. But I have to have a second thought I have to stop, take a breath because you're right. You can be sued over these things. You, you can, you know get, develop an amazing amount of, of criticism. And we live in a world where a housewife in Toledo can pretty much take down a major corporation in, through momentum built up through social media. So we just have to be more careful and sensitive to those things than, than ever before. It's a really important part of being a leader.

Doug Smith ([00:39:03](#)):

Yeah. so my work I'm, I'm a development director do fundraising for a living, and I'm sure, you know, you've helped organizations raise millions and millions of dollars. Yeah. Read about in the book. Talk to us about what have we, you learned about fundraising. What do I need to know?

Phil Cooke ([00:39:17](#)):

Well, fundraising is people struggle with it a lot, including me, everybody's uncomfortable asking for money, but it's vital. And I, I believe, first of all, it's not about asking for money. It's about giving people an opportunity to partner with you to make this vision happen. So I think there's a way you can do it. That's really successful. And one of the things that I've learned over the years, one of our clients is the museum of the Bible in Washington, DC. It's a just an amazing, amazing museum and I'd encourage anybody listening or viewing. If you're in DC, go check out the museum of the Bible. It's just really, really remarkable. And we've done all the external media for that, that museum from the groundbreaking. And one thing I've learned over those years was that today short videos, I'm talking two to six minute videos are, have become the number one marketing tool in America.

Phil Cooke ([00:40:05](#)):

There's more internet bandwidth I'm told, taken up with short videos than anything other than Netflix or Amazon prime. And so people are using short videos now to tell your story for fundraising, for marketing, for awareness, for membership, all kinds of things. And so one of the things I'd encourage fundraisers to do is understand, learn the power of short videos. And the, the key thing about short videos is they're not about facts or statistics. You know, if you have statistics about your organization and how amazing it is and the lives that's impacted, great, put that in a brochure, put it on the website, but with a video, I wanna see the story of a life that was transformed because of what you do. Let me tell you it's emotional video is emotional. And if you can do that, that will really open people up to wanting to know more about your organization. So from a fundraising perspective, really give those short videos a chance as they can tell your, your story in a powerful, powerful way, particularly if what you do like with your organization, you're dealing with, with people on the street with homeless people people that are really struggling what a, that's so powerful visually, to be able to use video, to tell that story. So from a fundraising perspective, video has become really a powerful, powerful tool.

Doug Smith ([00:41:18](#)):

Yeah, absolutely agree. We've invested more and more in video production in the past two years than we ever have. Cuz we, we definitely see that playing out. I wanna transition into the lighting round, which is just a bunch of fun questions that I ask every leader on the podcast. And the first question is what is the best advice you've ever received and who gave it to you?

Phil Cooke ([00:41:37](#)):

You know, I would not say it's advice, but it was brutal criticism. When I was in my twenties, it was a long time ago and we didn't have a leadership techniques. We didn't have John Maxwell. We didn't have, you know, everything today is about making safe spaces and you know, being gracious and I'm all for, you know, being gracious and being nice. But I grew up with working for leaders that had no clue about that. They were not afraid to throw things. They were not a thing. They were, they were screamers. I've had profanity screamed at me over projects. I had a gun pulled on me one time in the editing room by a producer. I mean, no lie. This guy was a nut. And but the thing is you have a gun pulled on you in the editing room during a project, nothing bothers you after that.

Phil Cooke ([00:42:24](#)):

I think my best experience early on that, that I had some pretty brutal bosses. And so today, and I hated them and we hate those guys day, but it really taught me to have a thick skin. And so critics don't bother me very much. You know, people that don't like my work that doesn't bother me very much, always wanna improve and listen to listen to other ideas. But I think early on I, so I would just tell people,

listening or watching value those harsh critics value people that are brewed don't necessarily reject them just because they're kind of ugly to you. Stop, take a deep breath and think about their criticism and maybe it could apply. And I learned over and over and over again, you know what they were jerks, but they were right. And it made a dramatic difference for me early on. So that's a long-winded way, way to put it. But sometimes the harshest critics can your be your best friend when it comes to improving your work

Doug Smith ([00:43:21](#)):

So good. If you could put a quote on a billboard for everyone to read, what would it say?

Phil Cooke ([00:43:27](#)):

There's a Walt Disney quote. I've always loved that. Basically says the best way to get started is to stop talking and start doing. I meet so many creative people, producers, writers actors, who they're waiting for their big break. They're waiting for to meet a producer. They're waiting for a studio deal. They're waiting to meet a publisher. They're waiting for something else, maybe a investor. Let me tell you, you get, you become successful by starting now. I wrote two or three, but books before anything got published, I, I had five or six screenplay that I kept in my drawer that nobody had ever seen because they were the roadmap. They were the RO, they, they were really my workout to try to become a good writer. And so start right now, your first SCR screenplay, your first movie is not gonna be the one that makes you millions and millions of dollars.

Phil Cooke ([00:44:15](#)):

It's a long journey and a long road. So I think Walt was right. Get out there, stop talking about it, start doing it. Even if you have to pay for it yourself, get out there. My, my, my daughter, Kelsey and her husband, Chris Garra made a movie during the pandemic and they funded it themselves. And now it's touring all over the country at one best, best feature and best comedy at the Beaufort South Carolina film festival, it's been in Spokane, Santa Fe, it got picked for the LA comedy Fest. It's just picking up steam. It's got 10 or Mo 10 or more festivals they've been invited to. And they did it on their own with their own money during the pandemic. So there really is nothing that can hold you back. If you're willing to start yourself with whatever tools you have,

Doug Smith ([00:44:57](#)):

What's the best purchase you've made in the last year for a hundred dollars or less.

Phil Cooke ([00:45:03](#)):

That's a great question. I don't know. I think maybe an probably an app. I use a, I use a to-do app called things. A task master are called things and it's, I think it's about 75 bucks to buy it out. And at first I, I recoiled, but I'll tell you, it's the greatest thing that ever happened to me. I, I, I don't get, I, I'm not an advocate of getting stuck in your to-do list, but I do have to get it outta my brain and get it down in a piece of paper or in an app. I just, if I could do that, then it frees me up. I can relax and think and can be creative, but just keeping it's really, I think what things is for me is more of a, an idea vault. I just throw my ideas in there.

Phil Cooke ([00:45:40](#)):

I've got a new book idea. Great. Put it down. I learned, I tell you this, and this might be worth sharing years ago. I think I talk about this in the book years ago, I,uhad a encounter at a Christmas party with a

very successful business band from South Africa. And, uh, I have, I have the spiritual gift of asking what everybody else is thinking. So I said, you know, how did you make your money? How did you get so rich? And he said, well, it's interesting you ask. He said, years ago, back in the days of flip phones, remember flip phones. He said, my wife wanted me to go shopping with her. And he said, I hated shopping. I, but I love my wife. So I went, he said at the time I just had a regular job. I was a normal guy, went shopping with my wife about an hour into it.

Phil Cooke ([00:46:20](#)):

I got tired. So she went into one more dress shop and I went out and sat on a bench at the mall. She said, I start, he said, I started watching teenagers, use their phones and thought that he said, this idea just hit me. That if I could, if they could, could download their favorite songs and use them as ring tones that would probably be a really successful idea. And he said, he thought so much of it. He, he found a brochure, a piece of paper on the bench, got a pin out, wrote it down, put it in his jacket pocket. But at that same moment, his wife called him into the store to look at a dress. He said he walked in the store and completely forgot about the idea. He said, six months later, he went to the closet, put on that same jacket, just outta habit, reached into his pocket and found that note.

Phil Cooke ([00:47:00](#)):

And he said, it reminded him of that night at the mall. And so he bought, he said, okay, I gotta do this. This is a good idea. So he bought a computer, bought the rights to five songs, made a deal with the local cell phone company. And he said, two years later, he sold that company for 75 million. And he said, looked at me and he said, Phil, but here's the thing you need to know. Had I not written that idea down, I would've completely forgotten about it. So my word to people listening today is, you know, how often are we hit with ideas out of the blue, but if we don't capture them and a big part of my book is capturing ideas because if you have to deliver ideas on a deadline, the title of the book, you have to learn how to capture 'em. Well, whether it's in the middle of the night, whether you're driving, whatever it is, learn to capture ideas because they're so fragile. If you don't, they'll disappear.

Doug Smith ([00:47:47](#)):

Yeah. You talked about, I mean, that story emphasizes the power of questions and your willingness ask questions. And I always love, you know, you've gotten to spend time with some of the most influential people on the planet. I'm curious when you get time with a leader like that or with anyone, do you have a go-to question or two that you always ask?

Phil Cooke ([00:48:03](#)):

You know what, that's a great thing. First of all, let me say that. You're exactly right when I'm with somebody like Mark Burnett or somebody, you know, really significant in their career, who's done really well. I don't talk about me. I wanna talk about, I wanna know about them. And so I'm constantly hitting them up and yet I'll get young filmmakers who will come to my office, cuz I travel so much. Sometimes it takes months to schedule a meeting, but I'll get young filmmakers that come to my office. One advice about their career, from what they walk in the door, they talk nonstop. I literally had a guy about six months ago that came in, sat down, started talking. I don't think he took a breath and 55 minutes later, I finally waved my hands and said, excuse me, but you know, we had an hour book, we had an hour book, I've gotta go to another meeting.

Phil Cooke ([00:48:46](#)):

And I have no idea what you came here for. You could have stayed at home. So you know, it was, I was kind of harsh, but I wanted him to understand that you get a, you get that moment with a great leader or somebody that's important or anybody you respect. Don't talk about you the whole time ask about them. So I really wanna ask, you know, how, how they broke through what, you know, what, what are they doing now? What advice would they give people? I'm just constantly barraging them with questions. And the truth is people love to share. People love to share. And I found out now how, no matter how big the leader is, if you're honest and you're just asking really, really good questions. They'll talk all day.

Doug Smith ([00:49:25](#)):

Yeah. I'm curious, you mentioned Mark Burnett. I know you've been around Joyce and, and Joel and, and so many other leaders have any of them impacted your, your life in a significant way? That's a fun story to share.

Phil Cooke ([00:49:36](#)):

Oh yeah. A lot of different ways. A great and not, not always fun, but, but Joyce Meyer for instance is she, she, one thing I learned for Joyce is she hates strife, hates strife with her team and she will do anything. I, and I mean anything to get rid of strife, she understands just how destructive it can be. So many leaders allow people on their team to nitpick each other, criticize each other, talk about each other behind their back. She absolutely will not stand for it. And as a result, her creative team is absolutely amazing. I mean like her hater, whatever you feel about Joyce, her team rocks. And it's because she's so diligent and, and, and ferocious about rooting out strife on her team. And I think that's such an incredible, incredible thing. Other people I've learned tons of stuff from I, I, I <laugh> I've let me think real quick.

Phil Cooke ([00:50:33](#)):

You know, Joel Ostein has taught me stuff. Steve ver has taught, taught me stuff. Jack Graham has taught me stuff. I, I'm just a, I, I soak up things and I'm around people I wanna learn from them. And I think it's just, I, I think the thing I learned from Joel, you mentioned Joel. So I'll say that, I think the thing I've learned from Joel is, you know, he has trouble saying no, but he has varying degrees of yes. And once you get to know Joel, you learn what yes means. Yes. And what yes means there is no way we're gonna do that project. And he's just so incredibly gracious. And I think that's what I love about him. That non-believers, you know, people that aren't even remotely interested in being a Christian, wanna engage with him and they wanna talk to him. And a lot of people he's led to Christ because he's just been so incredibly gracious with him and not been offensive and driven him away. And so we all have our different approaches and different styles, but I've learned that, that you can, you know, just by being gracious, you can have such an impact on people who are hurting broken. It's made a real difference.

Doug Smith ([00:51:33](#)):

Yeah. You mentioned one of the questions that you ask is, you know, about a time they had a breakthrough in their life and you know, I look at your career and even some of the people you just mentioned that you got to work with, I'm sure. You know, any producer listening, this would say, I would, I would kill for an opportunity to work with them. Was there a breakthrough for you and your, a career that kind of opened those doors or was it slow and steady?

Phil Cooke ([00:51:52](#)):

Yeah, I'm, I'm really big on rethinking your life about every five to 10 years. One of the things I discovered is you know, I, I like to, I'm constantly trying to improve. I, I just believe that constant improvement is critical, but we have minor. You know, we, we rethink our lives in minor ways, make minor and adjustments you know, every year or two, but every five to 10 years, we need to be thinking of having a huge reset. I know in my life, about 15 years ago, I looked around and I realized that my work was getting kind of dated my commercials, my television programs the short films I was doing, the pro the creative projects. I was just were kind of dated in their style. And I looked around and I thought younger producers and camera operators and directors, they're doing some amazing things and their stuff looks a lot better than mine.

Phil Cooke ([00:52:41](#)):

And so I'm, you know, I immediately started surrounding myself with younger people, younger vision people that were really exceptionally a and creative because I wanna constantly keep growing. And, and in the process, I learned that very often, you know, I had gotten a claim a number of years earlier. I'd gotten a claim for a lot of the commercials. I'd done a lot of television programs. We'd won a bunch of awards. And I learned that when you get noticed, when you get a lot of publicity or you win war awards, you kind of get stuck at mode of thinking, you know, when you get, do something really well, you kind of tend to get stuck in a rut in that way. And so years go by and if you haven't changed and adjusted and adapted to the way culture has changed, you're gonna get left behind. And so it taught me a really valuable lesson, which I would share is, you know, every 10 or 15 years have a serious rethink about the work you're doing the style that you're doing, your leadership techniques, how you're doing that because the world changes. And if we don't change it with it, we're gonna get pretty much left in the dust.

Doug Smith ([00:53:39](#)):

Wow. What's your greatest leadership pet peeve.

Phil Cooke ([00:53:44](#)):

I'd say it again.

Doug Smith ([00:53:45](#)):

Your greatest leadership pet peeve.

Phil Cooke ([00:53:47](#)):

Oh, pet peeve. Oh man. How many, how much time do we have? I've got a lot of them. <Laugh> I've got a lot of 'em. I think one of my big pet peeves is is leaders that really don't value their team. And it sounds strange because is your team is what makes you work. But so many leaders disrespect their team. They disregard their team. They don't value their team. I have creative people call me all the time that say, my boss won't spend time with me. My pastor, my CEO. They won't spend time with me. They, they don't wanna hear my ideas about things. And it's just really tragic because we, you know, Jack, Jack ma John Maxwell has a great saying, and that's you gotta walk the factory floor a great, leader's gotta walk the floor, meet the people, know who they are.

Phil Cooke ([00:54:35](#)):

One of the things that Ed Catmull, who was the president of Pixar they were so they've been so wildly successful. One of the things that Ed Catmull did that I always admire so much is when they would make a movie like Toy Story. And it would just be a super success. Many of the animators on the film would get a bonus and that could be 60 animators would be getting that bonus. And it would've been so easy for Ed just to direct deposit that bonus in their, into their bank account. But he wrote out a check for everybody and he, he would have them come to his office or he would go to their office and he would personally hand 'em that check, tell 'em how much they were appreciated, how much they meant to him and how, what a contribution they made on the project. And he would do that with as many as 60 people after a successful movie. And that just made me realize why Pixar has such an incredible team around them. They're just incredible. And so that's how to build the team value your people, take the time with them, and it makes such a huge, huge difference.

Doug Smith ([00:55:36](#)):

Yeah. I'm, I'm not sure if you have a bucket list, but I know you've had plenty of cool experiences in your life. What's something that you've done that you believe everyone should do before they die.

Phil Cooke ([00:55:46](#)):

Well I I'm a big, big traveler. I been, like I said, I've been, I've filmed in about seven countries around the world. And I was traveling overseas during the pandemic. I've learned all the pandemic rules for traveling in countries like Turkey and, and Italy which is a pain, but I'm a big believer in travel. I just think my life has been so opened up because I've had these experiences and, and because I'm doing documentary films very often for nonprofits or ministry organizations, you're put in very, very dangerous places. I've been caught up in a couple military, cos I've been shot at, I fell out of a helicopter flying over Jamaica. So there's, you know, you have some that that will change your life when you've had experiences like that. And it gives you a new perspective. And so it's much like having the pistol drawn on me in the edit room.

Phil Cooke ([00:56:33](#)):

Yeah. I, once that happens, criticism doesn't bother you. You know, you go to a whole new, new level in your leadership. So I I'd say yeah, get out there and, and, and really do things, different things. I think the greatest thing about travel, particularly when you're filming on the road is you're constantly encountering things. You didn't expect, you know, customs officials that are jerks or, you know, just things didn't show up on time or, you know, whatever. There's so many issues, travel problems that it just makes you incredibly resilient as a leader. And you're up with, okay. Plan B what's plan B what's plan C what's plan D makes such a huge, huge difference.

Doug Smith ([00:57:09](#)):

Is there one item at least left on your bucket list that you could share?

Phil Cooke ([00:57:14](#)):

Oh yeah. You know what, I've really gotten into documentary films recently and I've got a couple documentaries on the drawing board. I can't talk about 'em too much, but I, I think what we're finding is during most of my career documentaries were poison. I mean, nobody wanted to watch 'em. Nobody wanted to fund them. And now with, but now with Amazon prime and Netflix, they're becoming insanely popular, people are loving really in depth, hard hitting documentary films. We did one right before the pandemic on the rise of Christianity in Asia and we film owned in India, China, Mongolia,

Japan, and Korea on one single plane flight, we went from 107 degrees in India on the plane, got off the plane in minus 16 in Ulaanbaatar Mongolia. And that'll straighten out. But documentaries are real passion of mine. And I have a couple on the drawing board that I'm about to reveal pretty soon that I really wanna pursue this year that I think will be amazing. So that, and that's a, that's a good word of encouragement out there. Most Christians, I think of people particularly or people with a cause of some kind they wanna promote, try to make, you know, take a limited budget and do a dramatic film terribly when with that same budget, they could do a really powerful documentary film. So document on the rise are on the rise and I'd encourage people to explore that more.

Doug Smith ([00:58:29](#)):

Yeah. If you could go back and have coffee with yourself at any age and give that self advice, what age would it be and what would you tell 'em

Phil Cooke ([00:58:38](#)):

Maybe every year of my life? <Laugh> I, you know, I, I, I, it drives me nuts when people say I have no regrets because I have about a million regrets. I have, you know, I think if you look back on your life really objectively you don't know what, you know, what God has planned. You don't know the decisions you made were good, bad or whatever, but, and I always think, you know, God will, will compensate for, for bad decisions that we make, but there are things, if I knew, then what I know now about the industry about, you know, personal discipline about my family, about things like that, I would've done things dramatically differently. And, and there's just too many, you know, I mentioned earlier about the fact that I launched my career as a director and I virtually wasted 10 or 15 years when had, I figured out writing and producing was the thing I should focus on.

Phil Cooke ([00:59:29](#)):

Where would my career be now if I could get those 10 or 15 years back. And so there's decisions like that, that I think maybe I learned something in that process of banging my head against a wall. But if I knew that then I would've loved it, but probably high school, probably college, probably in my twenties, my thirties, every, every decade of my life. I would've loved to have had that conversation because it would've changed I, I, I don't know again where God would've taken me, but I think it might've changed a lot of things in my life.

Doug Smith ([00:59:57](#)):

And on the other side of your life, at the end of your journey, what do you wanna be remembered for? What do Phil Cooke's legacy to be?

Phil Cooke ([01:00:03](#)):

I think I want to be said that I was the guy that helped the church really speak the language of the culture. I think we live in a world today, like I said, 10,000 media messages a day were being overwhelmed with media. And what worked 10 years ago, even five years ago is not necessarily worked. I, I think that what my vision in life, cuz I'm a Christian and you know, other leaders may be, may not be that are listening to this, but that's my passion is how do I help the church tell their story more effectively in this incredibly cluttered culture that we live in. Pastors, aren't trained in this seminary does not train pastors and how to, you know, deal with media and culture and communications. They don't understand this. They're great at preaching or teaching or running a church, but when it comes to how we deal in this cluttered distracted culture, they're pretty much lost. And so I think if anything, the

legacy I wanna leave is to, you know, maybe Phil help the church really speak the language of the culture and, and stay relevant in. We could have easily we're heading toward being marginalized disappearing from the culture. I hope we can stay in the game and keep that voice out there.

Doug Smith ([01:01:11](#)):

Anything else you wanna leave leaders with today?

Phil Cooke ([01:01:14](#)):

<Laugh> you know what I would just say hang in there. We can always improve. We can always get better. I think one of the things I love about so much is that I'm constantly seeing things and, and you know, at this point in my life that I think why did it take me so long to learn this? There's always something new. I love the quote from Michaelangelo, the peak of his career, possibly the greatest artist in the history of the world at the peak of his career, he said, I'm still learning. If I could say anything to you guys out there, keep learning because the world is changing quicker than it's ever changed before. And if we're not learning, we are dying. And so keep growing, keep learning. I think that's the difference for the future?

Doug Smith ([01:01:57](#)):

Well, Phil, this conversation was incredible. Thank you so much for adding value to me and all the leaders that are listening to this and thank you for everything you do for the church makes a huge difference.

Phil Cooke ([01:02:04](#)):

Thank you. Thrilled to do it.

Doug Smith ([01:02:09](#)):

Well, Hey leader, thank you so much for listening to my conversation with Phil. I hope that you enjoyed it as much as I did. You can find ways to connect with him and links to everything that we discussed in the show notes at l3leadership.org/313 and leaders. Always. I wanna challenge you that if you want to 10 X your growth this year, then you need to either launch or join an L3 Leadership mastermind group. Mastermind groups have been the greatest source of growth in my life over the last seven years. And if you're unfamiliar with what they are, they're just groups of six to 12 leader leaders that meet together for a one year on a consistent basis in order to help each other grow, hold each other accountable and to do life together. So if you're interested in learning more about masterminds, go to L3Leadership.org/masterminds, and as always leader, I like to end every episode with a quote I'll quote, Phil Cooke, who said this, and this makes so much sense for this episode. He said the most valuable commodity of the 21st century will be undivided attention. So good and so true.

Doug Smith ([01:03:05](#)):

Well leaders always, I hope that this episode encouraged, you know that Laura and I love you. We believe in you and we say it all the time, but leader keep leading, do not quit. The world needs your leadership. We'll talk to you next episode.