



A Leader's Vision is Only the Beginning | A How I Lead Interview with Greg and Deborah Stapley

May 18, 2022

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Let's be honest, few humans enjoy meetings, and many feel trapped in meetings. As leaders, we don't want to burden those we lead, but meetings can seem to do that more often than not. We wanted to address the pain of meetings through the meetings with saints, library. Here we have 15 plus presentations dedicated to improving the meetings we run. We have experts in the field addressing topics like getting people involved in meetings, staying on task, dealing with conflict and meetings and a ton more. We'd love you to explore the full meetings with saints library over 14 days at no cost to you. You can do this by visiting leading-saints.org/14 that's leading-saints.org/14 or click the link in the show notes. Today I'm in Salt Lake City, Utah in a corner of a hotel lobby. I wasn't going to I wasn't going to reveal where we're at. But here we are, nonetheless, we make these interviews happen. Rain or snow in downtown hotel lobby or not, I'm with Greg and Deborah Stapley. How are you two? We're doing we're doing well. Thank you for having us. Awesome. Now maybe put us why are you in Salt Lake right now? You're from Southern California, right? Yeah, so what led to this meeting here? Well, Greg and I have been recently asked to serve as mission leaders for the church in Queretaro, Mexico. We begin July 1st and part of that process is obtaining a Visa. And so the church flew us up here today so that we could meet the lovely people at the Mexican consulate office. Who took our picture and our fingerprints and hopefully we will receive that Visa in time to leave on July 1st. Are you nervous that you won't receive it or is Mexico? I think the church's relationship with Mexico has been pretty good and it seems like they're on top of this. We should get there in plenty of time. I did make me nervous though mailing my passport. Yeah, that is a little nerve wracking. Drop it in a

mailbox and hope you see it again. Yeah, right. But I saw it today with my own two eyes. I didn't give it back to me yet, but I'm pretty sure we will eventually get it back. So Greg, maybe there's the story out how did this call come to be? Usually starts with a random phone call. I've been a state president for the past 8 and a half years and so regular contact with the brethren and they just, you know, more areas 70 that I knew called and what's your situation? A couple of years ago. And, you know, financial personal families, everything okay, health. They ask you a few random questions and then they tell you, okay, think nothing of this conversation. So this was with an area 70 that you do. It was with actually a friend. And he said, you know, give me an ever hear anything again. And so this last fall, we had another phone call, and it was a secretary for elder Stevenson and the core of the 12, said he wanted to chat with us. And so we set that up and had a Zoom call with him to spend about an hour as delightful as you might imagine. And at the end of it, he said the same thing. Okay, well, nice to get to know you. Let's stay in touch. And in fact, he said, not only let's stay in touch, but he said, hey, if you're ever up in subtle Lake, you know, give me a call. We'll go to lunch. Or something else. Always available. This is so cool. That's so cool. The nicest guy. And so he at the end of the year and he said, you know, we make all you for something we may not. And lo and behold, about a week later, coincidentally, I was flying back from Washington, D.C. where I had been speaking at a healthcare conference, and as the plane touched the tarmac in Salt Lake, my phone rang, and it was president Nelson's secretary asking if we would come over.

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And I was meeting Debbie. Should we were coming up here for some meetings. And. All worked out, we got to meet with president Nelson and received a call, and it was a wonderful experience. So here we are. And at that point, it's not the call as far as a specific location to just say, this is happening. Location came, I think, that was off to a mid October. I think location came first we could December. Nice. And where did you serve as the young missionary? I served in southern Spain in the Spain, civil mission. So were you hoping for a Spanish speaking? We knew that we knew that the Spain missions were not open. The mission leaders and those missions have some time left to go. Which we had never heard of. When you look at it and study it, it's so the Spanish influence is very heavy. And it's all Spanish colonial architecture and some of these older towns and it just seems like a perfect, we've just got the immediate feeling that this was the perfect calling for Greg and Edward stapley. Nice. Now, your family is experienced the bishop calling before and the snake president calling and I'm sure you have a unique story just sort of going into that that responsibility I see it as a family responsibility with some of those colleagues. So with this, I mean, speak to the wives of leaders out there who, you know, walking into what those sort of feelings have gone through, how do you prepare? I mean, has it been different than some of those others? Well, you know, it's funny yesterday we were in the kitchen and Greg is making dinner. He's making Sunday dinner. And

that hasn't happened in years. He has not been home to help with Sunday dinner. Ever that I can remember in near memory. So it's kind of been a divide and conquer relationship group with Greg. And with me, he's kind of had his responsibilities. I've had mine. But we very rarely had any assignment that we've been able to work on together. And so this is really an exciting opportunity for us now to be able to be companions. And serve really arm in arm, shoulder to shoulder, and work on something so important together. I mean, still, we're still sort of in divide and conquer mode. Because there's still so many things to do to get ready to go. He has his list. I have my list. We're still sort of conquering things. But as I think as soon as we get to credit and we are, we are really fully engaged every minute in preparing for the zone conferences. Welcoming new missionaries, state conferences, all the things that you do as mission leaders. I'm really looking forward to being able to be with them all the time. Nice. It's going to be a lot of fun. And that's something that we didn't expect. At least I didn't expect when I came back from my mission. I worked a couple of years at the MTC, and I taught couples. Senior couples were going out in one of the more interesting things I learned as a 21 22 year old was that I'd get these couples in who'd been married for 40 years. And we claim they had never been a crossword between them and within two weeks of being together 24/7. They were kind of like picking at each other and the truth. And so. That dynamic is kind of stuck with me throughout our marriage. And we're heading 40 years in a couple of weeks. Oh, wow. And so we haven't experienced any of that as we've dug in together. And started working toward this mission. Yeah. And they were just for fighting back on the bishop ears and the stake president years. Like any principles or if you were to go back in time to day one and talk to yourself, any advice that comes to mind readily as far as making that work or making that a positive experience? You know what? It never was a negative experience for me. And I wonder if maybe sometimes it's because I grew up with a dad who was always a bishop or a stake president too, so it was normal. That was my normal. Gotcha. You know? Having a dad who was often engaged in church work. But when my dad was home, he was home, like he didn't really bring that home so much, right? And Greg has been kind of the same way. And I guess if there's one thing I could say, I just don't resent the time that they're spending away because where would you rather they be? I mean, maybe home, I guess, but other than home.

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I guess I would always have the idea run through my head that I always knew that he wanted to be home, that if he wasn't doing what he was doing, if it wasn't in a bishopric meeting or a stake president meeting or something like that, I knew that he would rather be home. And so I mean, I guess if you have this worry that your husband's not home, because he doesn't want to be home, then that could cause some conflict and. Some real angst in your life. But when you know that your husband rather be home and that's his favorite place to be. I don't know, it just never bothered me. That he was gone. And I travel extensively for business as well. And so when she

says I wasn't home, I wasn't home. But there are adjustments I make because in the reason she can say, I knew he wanted to be on. If for work, if I had a trip to make, if there was a way, ever for me to sleep in my own bed, take the first flight out, take the last flight back. It doesn't matter if it's a 22 hour day. Just get home. That's always been my policy. Yeah. Yeah, that's awesome. How would you describe your career? I started as a lawyer with large law firm in Phoenix, Arizona, my hometown, and was partnered there. Eventually went in-house with client, and then in about 99 started with some partners. A really good little healthcare company that's done very, very well. Went public in 2007, that was an experience. And in 2014, I started as a real estate lawyer. So it kind of came full circle in 2014. We took all the real estate. We had accumulated in this growing healthcare company and spun it out into a public real estate investment trust. Nice. So character trust is my company. I've just handed over the reigns as CEO a couple of months ago. I was accessor still on the board, sermon of the board, but they know you won't be around. They know I'm not going to be around for a while. That is great company. And I've had great leadership business leadership experiences there as well. Nice. And so I assume you're released as stake president came because of this mission call. Indeed, yes. So how long did you serve as a state president? 8 and a half years. Okay, so you're about time anyway. It was about the I was going to be, it was going to be 9. And so. And did you go right from bishop to state president? No. Okay. So you had a how many years? Let's see. I had about 7 or 8 years in between where I served like councils and spent interestingly talking about the lord preparing you. We have a Spanish ward in our stake. And I was like, counsel adviser to that word for about three years. So I was in it every day. And my Spanish just come back to a large degree because of that experience. And it's prepared me a little bit for this. And we talked before we hit recorded about this dynamic of you have a heavy leadership career and it's maybe tempting to let those business leadership principles spill over into spiritual leadership. But sometimes that doesn't work, other times it may, but what comes to mind when you think about that dynamic? Well, I always remember and I don't know where it can't give you the exact quote, but president Benson said something to the effect that you business guys don't think you can run your church call in the same way you run your business. It's not the same. And the objectives are not the same. And that gets really tough when you're in a business leadership role in your working really hard. And the phone rings. And you're switching your toggling between the business and the stake president or the bishop or the whatever 5, 6, ten times a day, literally. In business, we had some very clear objectives that had to do with serving the best interests of shareholders, making sure our employees were taking care of and advancing the goals and objectives of the business. In a pretty aggressive way. In church, there's a different dynamic. It's about people. And the many you think it's about the programs, you are off track. The programs are means to an end. The people are the end and helping them come under Christ and make sure that their strength and they grow.

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And so you take people that you wouldn't hire in your business and you put them into leadership roles and you work and you mentor and your patient and you exercise a lot more patience in the church calling than I would in a business role. Yeah. And what did that patients look like as far as because obviously in the business world you're maybe delegating or assigning and there's some accountability there. That's a tough part in the church context is this concept of accountability or follow through and whatnot. Sometimes it's hard to do it in the same way in the church context because man this is a volunteer person, you know, they're not getting paid for this and this is really all we got in this geographic area, but any as far as accountability or delegation that comes to mind in the church context? Well, the church systems and the training that you get is a true solution very good in terms of follow-up and accountability and seeing the things get done and having those systems in place in both business and church really helps. Have your system make sure it works. And then execute on it. You are executing. And honestly, even in church, I'm kind of a pusher and I would push, but in business a lot was about the outcome. In church, the lord takes care of the outcome. And it's really about helping that person to learn and grow and maybe get ready for their next role. Or just solve whatever challenges in front of them, just mature spiritually. And if you get that, but the outcomes not that awesome, that's when you just kind of say, yeah, but the lord's in charge. And everything will be fine. And it will be. You don't get that luxury in business, but in church, the lord's in charge. So you say you're a pusher. Does an experience come to mind where I'm sure you weren't making people cry in your office? Pushing too hard, but that characteristic look like. No, I hope I was a kind and benevolent dictator. I'm very collaborative. And I did carry that over into the church thing. I really think listening is important. And not just because people will have information that you need. But because they need to know that they've been heard. And I think it's foolish for a business leader, for example, to go out and work really hard to hire the best people they can hire. And then not listen to them and not give them the latitude and the trust and things that they need to do their job. So I probably did carry a lot of that over into the church calling very listening, very collaborative. I really like the counseling model that the brethren have taught over and over and over to sit and counsels. And make sure everybody's heard. That's hard. Sometimes, because there are some who just are hesitant to speak up. And making sure that they feel comfortable and get and get their thoughts out, is really, really important. So it's about process on both sides. But the objectives just end up being a little bit different. Yeah. And then I noticed that this concept of listening is like, well, you just make sure your ears are on. They're looking at them. Maybe you're nodding, right? But there's a difference between just listening and helping somebody feel like they're being heard. So if you were to train a brand new leader on how to effectively listen or help an individual feel like they're being heard, any principles or concepts come to mind. Well, nothing new Steven cubby taught this for years. The reflexive listening and just rather than sitting there planning the next thing you're going to say. It's really important to actually hear what they're telling you and then repeat it back in some way or provide something that builds on it. And I don't know that that's a skill that I've developed or just had, but I've been able to do that. I think fairly well. Yeah. Well, no, I would just, I was just agreeing. Yeah. He's a great listener. He's very patient. And which has made me very grateful that he's my companion because he's needed to be. That makes for a good husband as well, right? Yes, exactly. That's what I mean. Abandoned. He's great. No, you mentioned, as far as people before we hit record,

you talked about your time as a stake release study president and really connecting with the people you lead and helping them feel loved. And this is sort of almost a cliché we have.

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Not just in our faith tradition, but you know what, we want people to feel loved. So anything going on as far as how you went about doing that. Well, if I could just kind of tag on to what Greg was talking about and give an example of what not to do, for example, I had this idea that I thought was great. Right? It was going to be this big. Community, fair, that we were calling healthy, wealthy, and wise. Oh, cool. And it had a great little catchy name, and it was just, I had this vision of it being like a convention hall at a county fair, just filled with information and music. Like, I had in my head what I wanted it to be. And I thought that that was personal revelation to me about what we should do. And I, but I could do it by myself, right? I needed people to help. And so our stake president, presidency, called a really talented, capable guy, brother in our state, to kind of do it, kind of organize it for us. And he had a different idea about how it should run. But rather than listening to him and really, really hearing his point of view, I was bugged. By it. I felt like, look, this is the idea. If you don't want to do it, let me know. We'll find somebody else to do it. Get on board. Get on board, or window or aisle. What do you want? And that was kind of my attitude. And constantly, so consequently, the planning really uneven the execution of this activity was really hard. Nothing, nothing really felt quite right. And it was my fault. Because I was just too stubborn to really acknowledge that other people might have really good ideas too. And something valuable to contribute. And you know, the event was good. It was fairly well attended, but not great, and anyway, the lesson I learned from that, though, is that. As Greg said, if you really are interested in being a good leader, you do have to acknowledge that there are other people that have good ideas too. And that if you will take time to listen and to coordinate your thoughts and synchronize your watches and so forth, you could come up with something really extraordinary that has a greater potential to accomplish even the goal that you might have felt inspired originally to achieve, you know, maybe that thought that you originally had was a stepping off point. And you need to acknowledge that and not be so, so stubborn and thinking that you have all the answers, which is kind of the trap that I fell into. I learned a great lesson there. Then the next activity I was asked to put together because of that experience, I approached it completely differently. And had a marvelous experience. I had in my head exactly what I wanted this particular activity to look like. It was a kind of a night at the museum, kind of themed thing where we were learning all about the book of Mormon. And so forth. And I had in my head what I wanted to do, but because of this committee that I asked to help, the ideas went back and forth and back and forth and they got changed a bunch of times, but what we ended up with was something that was so exciting and fun and wonderful. And it was a great lesson to me. That, you know, the idea that I think I'm inspired about is probably just a stepping off point. Yeah, I love that. 'cause it can seem so clear, you know, we have this vision of what this activity

or things gonna look like and we think this is the inspiration when reality is simply a step off point. I framing like that. And it sounds like there's this point where you sort of surrender that. And just saying, we're going to make, we're going to hear everybody's perspective. And it felt so good to be able to do that because it's not my personality.

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I am, I am pretty stubborn about things sometimes. I get an idea. Stop laughing. I get an idea, and I kind of want to see it through. But boy, it turned out so much better than my original idea. Yeah. And it was a great lesson for me. Just to listen. And Greg, you mentioned, as far as approaching leadership in the church with more focus on people and realizing that people are involved in it, I'm sure you did that in your business side as well. As a CEO maybe in the executive level, you have hundreds and thousands of people that maybe you're not connecting with that way. But what principles come to mind as far as seeing people as people and connecting with them and how did you go about them? You know, one thing very, very basic. For me was something that came from Deborah when I started a state president. People don't know, I'm 6 four two 50. I think I'm a big teddy bear, but people will say, you know, you're kind of intimidating. And so one of the things she told me right after I was called the state president is, look, you know, you've got to, you've got to connect with people in a extra special way because a lot of them are just kind of worried. About you. And one of the suggestions she made was that I could be more of a hugger. I did not grow up in a house where we hugged or did those kinds of things. And so through the course of years, I forced myself to learn, learn how to give somebody a heartfelt hug. And connect with them and express love and appreciation for them in a real way. Which I always felt, but was, again, didn't come from a background where that was expressed the same that way. And that went miles. I don't necessarily can't necessarily do that in every business setting. But I did try and make sure that people knew that I valued them. And that their contributions were very important. By listing it again and making sure that they had a seat at the table whenever we could make the table big enough. Yeah. Yeah. So going back to hugging like it was a set after every temple recommend interview, you were hugging people. I mean, how did you go about everyone? But you know, a lot of them, and if somebody comes in and they have a problem, and it's a lot of tears get shed in the leadership offices of the church. And you're careful, but we are, but a quick hug and you're going to be okay. It's helpful as anything you might say to people some people. I remember this feeling as a bishop where I would sort of my job to supply the kleenexes, right? But there's this feeling of some consciousness of like, hey, clean yourself up. This is you're a mess. Where a hug has more of like this. I just accept you. You're having a hard time and before you go, I just bring it in, brother. You know, like that type of thing. And it sounds so simple, but it does go a long way to offer that human connection were built. I mean, there's something about a hug that does something to our soul. That's good. Yeah, so what are the challenges we'll have as a mission leaders now is that

that's a really not okay. They've really taken the sisters. It's definitely the sisters. Hug the elders either. I'm not sure why that rule is there, but interesting, because I got a hug from my mission after every interview. Did you? Yeah. See? I'm trying to be old. 22 years ago. But I am sure there's some behind that. And there will be other ways. I think his mission leaders, you come in and the missionary is just naturally love you. We spent a day last week in a zone conference in the Los Angeles mission where the mission leaders John and Mary egypt are really dear Friends of ours. And they just testified over and over that the missionaries just love you automatically. So I don't think that's going to be an issue for us. That's good. So debora, I'm curious as you were coaching your husband and maybe being more compassionate or maybe try a hug every once in a while. Any other tips you'd have maybe if there is a leader who just who has this persona that's maybe more intimidating. It's not their fault. Maybe, but any other tips you'd give on being more compassionate. I wish I had tips, you know, my dad had the same problem. People were very intimidated by him. The booming voice and the big dark eyebrows and. What they don't see are the tears that roll down his face when he watches a movie.

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You know? When he sees today, he was showing me a painting that he recently bought or ordered of the stripling warriors and I could see his eyes tearing up as he just showed me the picture of it. Look at him right now. I mean, he's just the most tender heart and just because he's a big man. And he's a smart man and he's an handsome man. All of those things can be intimidating to people. So I don't really know what the secret is. I do think that you do have to try a little harder, you have to make more of an effort concerted effort to be sure that people know that you're just a normal guy, like they are, that you have struggles too and that we're all trying to do our best to return to heavenly father and, you know, life's not just perfect or trouble free for anybody that everybody has things to work on and deal with and overcome, including ourselves, I don't know, I think the more real you can be with people, the better if you can, if you can share some of your difficulties from time to time and people can see, oh, I guess he is normal. I think that's helpful. You know? People can see your vulnerabilities from time to time is not all bad. So I'm just curious like walking into this experience in a couple of months here. I mean, do you try and hold back of putting together too much of a plan? Because we sort of walk in there, I know exactly what this mission is. We're going to do this program and that program. And I'm going to do this and then you walk in there, maybe you're quickly humbled, or the outgoing mission president will just smile as he waves. Good luck. What's your approach to preparing for this for walking into this role? Well, we definitely instincts are spot on. We're definitely keeping an open mind about this. And we're going through a tremendous amount of training right now. I mean, there's an extraordinary amount of training materials that mission presence, mission leaders, receive thankfully. But one of the bits of counsel that we've had is that don't tear down fences before you know why they were put there. That's a great answer. So we'll go in with an open

mind and open eyes and we know that we've been called at this time with the skills and background experience and things that we have to bring to the equation and we'll apply those in time. But I think for us initially getting the lay of the land is going to be really, really important in listening a lot. Observing a lot and seeing how things really go. I think it's a great mission. We've just gotten access statistics. They're doing super well. It looks like. And we're just hoping we don't mess things up. At this point. Yeah, that's awesome. Well, any other principle that comes to mind that we want to make sure we cover before we wrap up. One of the things that came to mind when we were talking is has to do with problem solving, both in the business and the church setting. One of the things that I've learned is that there's a natural human instinct to over solve problems. And to overshoot the Mark, you have a problem, whatever it might be, and it causes pain or heartache or difficulty in the natural instinct is to plunk some kind of regulation or rule or fence in place in order to address it. So this can never happen again. And the fact of the matter is that if you don't really think it through, maybe this is just an isolated problem, the very low probability of happening and what you're really doing is you're putting handcuffs on all these other people that don't need them. And so from a leadership standpoint, I'm always careful not to over regulate. And I've done that in the business, and I've certainly done that in our stake. We lived through the COVID with everybody else. And making sure that we were really thoughtful within the guidelines offered by the area presidency in the brethren saw Lake, but with also the context of our stake and the local keys that I yelled, making sure that we didn't overshoot the mark was really, really important. I love that. And it brings to mind an experience I had in the stake presidency. We were asked by the church will have this days of 47 parade on pioneer day, right? Local stakes will create floats for these things.

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So we ask this one family to create a float to sort of spearhead it. You're in charge of it right now. And they were creativity, just sort of went off the charts. And remarkable, the problem is, is they doubled the budget that they blew it out of the water as far as what we gave them. And so we came together to state parentheses, how do we address this? Do you want to talk with him? And I just said, hey, listen. Yeah, they did that. Maybe we don't ask them to do the next float. But I don't think they are going to be served by going to them and sort of reprimanding them or saying, do you see what you did here? Let's find the money. We'll cover it and we'll move on and they'll. And we're just grateful they did a great float and go to bed knowing that, right? We could have overshoot that. And as leaders we learned something. We learned I should care for them. Expectations or directions or whatnot. But I love that. That friends because it's so easy, especially from that business setting, you know, to the church setting, like, hey, this needs to be addressed. And they need to know, and then we overshoot it. You end up with these huge bureaucracies that really make it difficult for anybody to function, and it's counterproductive. So be careful. Yeah. Well, I appreciate you taking the time to do this and making this work. I just

showed up on the wrong day, the wrong location, but you were so flexible and made this happen. And I just wish you the best of faith and encouragement as you go out and what a remarkable experience to serve in that part of the world. Thank you. Last question I have. And Greg will start with you and then Deborah, you can answer the same question your own words. But as you reflect back on your years of being a leader, being a leader in the church, how is being a leader helps you become a better follower of Jesus Christ. You know, as a leader, you get very unique opportunity to glimpse inside the personal and private lives of people who are struggling and you can't help if you're really paying attention, you can't help, but grow in personal compassion and understanding and patience for those who do. And I've learned over the years to be far less judgmental, the fact that that whole judge and injury thing is the role that I always hated the worst, being a bishop and stake president. To be far less judgmental and to just keep the thought in my heart that there, but for the grace of God, do I, and that could be my problem in my struggle and these people need our love and compassion. And I think that that right there makes you better follower of Jesus Christ, because that's what he would do. Yeah. Yeah. What comes to mind? I thought of the same thing. It just, when I've had these opportunities to be in a leadership position, I've had more occasion to. Learn about people's struggles, what they're going through. And it is become just so clear to me that everybody has struggles, everybody, people who you think have it all together, have everything, everything's going great. They have no troubles at all. It's not true. Everybody has things to overcome. And that's why we're here. If you didn't have things to overcome, there'd be no point of really being here. Anyway, I feel like as I've come to better understand that, that, that everybody has difficulties, and that we can help one another with our difficulties. As we're patient and understanding and not judgmental, it's helped me to understand that God looks at me that same way too. Our savior looks at all of us that way. He understands we're going through, he understands that we we all need to make progress and he forgives us when we, when we try to do better, but we do have to kind of acknowledge that we're having some trouble. And we need to constantly return to him. And that concludes this how I lead interview. I hope you enjoyed it and I would ask you, could you take a minute and drop this link in an email on social media in a text, wherever it makes the most sense and share it with somebody who could relate to this experience and this is how we, how we develop as leaders, just hearing what the other guy's doing, trying some things out, testing, adjusting, for your area, and that's where great leadership is discovered, right? So we would love to have you share this with somebody in this calling or a related calling, and that would be great.

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And also, if you know of somebody, any type of leader who would be a fantastic guest on how I lead segment, reach out to us, go to leading saints dot org slash contact, maybe send this individual an email, letting them know that you're going to be suggesting their name for this

interview. We'll reach out to them and see if we can line them up. So again, go to leading-saints.org/contact and there you can submit all the information and let us know. And maybe they will be on a feature how I lead segment on the leading-saints podcast. Remember, solve the burden of meetings by visiting leading-saints.org/14 and getting 14 days access to the meetings with saints, virtual library. It came as a result of a position of leadership, which was imposed upon us by the God of heaven who brought forth a restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and when the declaration was made concerning the all and only true and living church upon the face of the earth. We were immediately put in a position of loneliness. The loneliness of leadership from which we can not shrink nor run away. And to which we must face up with boldness and courage and ability