



- Dustin Moody: [00:02](#) Hello, and welcome to the Faith And Work Podcast, where we explore our everyday work in God's world. The Faith and Work Podcast is produced and hosted by Denver Institute for Faith and Work. I'm Dustin Moody, Director of Communications for Denver Institute, and our guest today is Dr. Michael Lindsey.
- Dustin Moody: [00:17](#) Michael is the president of Gordon College, and the author of the book *View From The Top: An Inside Look At How People In Power See And Shape The World*. As part of his doctoral dissertation, Michael spent 10 years interviewing more than 550 CEOs, Fortune 100 leaders, former presidents and cabinet members, to learn about how they operate as leaders.
- Dustin Moody: [00:36](#) Through his research, Michael challenges our traditional notions of leadership and shows that compassion, hard work and humility are common traits among the leaders he spoke with. He discussed his research with us at an event a few years ago, we want to share part of that talk with you today. We hope you enjoy hearing more from Dr. Michael Lindsey.
- Michael Lindsey: [00:58](#) Tonight, what I want to do is to share with you a couple of stories of some individuals that I met over the last 10 years, while I was conducting a large scale research project looking at the lives of leaders. It started out as my doctoral dissertation at Princeton, so I'm living proof that you can write a dissertation that your wife would describe as, "actually interesting."
- Michael Lindsey: [01:19](#) I ended up doing 550 face-to-face interviews. It's the largest study of its kind, and it took me 10 years to complete the research. I traveled all the way from Bar Harbor Maine to Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, and everywhere in between. I logged 400,000 frequent flyer miles while working on this project, which my wife and I still enjoy to this day. And I got a chance to meet some amazing people.
- Michael Lindsey: [01:42](#) Lot of times folks say, "I interview different kinds of people." I interviewed former presidents, Carter and Bush. Cabinet secretaries like Donna Shalala and Condoleezza Rice. Leaders in the military like Wesley Clark, who has the coolest title in the world; Supreme Allied Commander of NATO. I mean, it doesn't get much better than that. I interviewed 250 CEOs, including 20 are the Fortune 100 CEOs, as well as heads of nonprofit organizations, national research universities, like the presidents of Princeton and Harvard and Stanford.

- Michael Lindsey: [02:15](#) Many folks say, "How did you get these interviews?" I mean, it's an interesting array of folks. For every one hour of interview that I conducted, we did 20 hours of background research. So we learned a lot about these folks, and it was a wonderful sort of graduate degree in life and in leadership. Sometimes though, getting the interview, it's just a matter of being in the right place at the right time. I was out in Silicon Valley doing some interviews with technology executives and had a couple of hours to kill. So I went over to the bookstore at Stanford.
- Michael Lindsey: [02:48](#) And while I was there, I looked out my corner of my eye and I saw a woman who looked exactly like Karen Hughes. Now, Karen Hughes had served as counselor to president for George W. Bush, highest ranking position in White House history for a woman to hold outside of the Cabinet. And I knew that she was a committed Christian. She'd been an elder at our church in Austin, and I have been trying to get access to Karen Hughes for two years. And here she was in the flesh. This is my big moment. So I thought, "I'm going to go ask her for an interview."
- Michael Lindsey: [03:21](#) And just as I started to approach her, I realized, I've never asked somebody for an interview face-to-face. I've sent letters and faxes and emails. It's sort of like asking somebody out on a date face-to-face. What if they say no? Then it's humiliating and awkward.
- Michael Lindsey: [03:37](#) So I decided I needed to get my nerve up. So I just sort of circled around Karen Hughes. And at the end of the circle, I was still pretty nervous. So I decided "I'm going to circle again." So I circled Karen Hughes a second time, still nervous, a third time, still circling. Four times. After the fifth cycle, I decided, this is too stressful. Nobody deserves this kind of stress. I walked out of the bookstore, and there's a large plaza outside the bookstore at Stanford, and I'm standing up there. It was a very bright, sunny day. And I'm thinking, "Now Lord, why was that such a big deal to me? So what if she says no, she'll forget it in five minutes and I'll remember it the rest of my life."
- Michael Lindsey: [04:20](#) I just thought, "I'm going to go try again." So I walked back into the bookstore and I can't find her. And I thought, "This is divine punishment."
- Michael Lindsey: [04:28](#) Eventually I noticed that she had moved upstairs to the coffee bar. So I start walking up the stairs. And as I'm going up, I'm thinking, "Now, how do I address her? Do I say Madame

Counselor, or Counselor Hughes, or Mrs. Hughes? Hey Karen," you know, what am I supposed to say? And I'm still having this conversation when I reach her. I don't know what to do, so I just tap her on the shoulder. She turns around.

Michael Lindsey: [04:50](#) Now, when I get nervous, I have this habit of getting red splotches on my neck and face. And the moment she turned around, I could feel the blood rushing up my face, and I realized I had about 60 seconds before I would be beet red. I said, "Mrs Hughes, My name is Michael Lindsey, I'm a sociologist and I'm working on this project, interviewing people of faith in positions of responsibility, and I'm wondering if you'd sit down with me and give me an interview."

Michael Lindsey: [05:17](#) And she said, "Well, I'm actually out here looking at colleges with my son, so this is not the right time. But here's my phone number, and give me a call in a few months, I'd be happy to sit down with you."

Michael Lindsey: [05:27](#) I held onto her phone number, and a couple of months passed, and I gave her a call. I said, "Mrs Hughes, my name is Michael Lindsey. I don't know if you remember me."

Michael Lindsey: [05:34](#) She said, "Oh yes, the young man that turned bright red at Stanford."

Michael Lindsey: [05:39](#) I said, "Yes, that's me." And she said, "Sure, be happy to sit down with you." And it was a great interview.

Michael Lindsey: [05:45](#) Because here's a woman who had not really spent her whole professional life trying to get into the inner chamber of political power, and yet that's where she found herself. And once she was in there, she began wondering, "Is this really what I want my life to look like? I'm working these long hours. I never see my son or my husband, and it just is a lot harder than I imagined." Over the course of my research, I had a chance to meet some extraordinary individuals, people who really, in one way or another, are running the world.

Michael Lindsey: [06:19](#) Indeed, they are using their work to make the world, in all different kinds of shapes and sizes. And as I thought about what I might share to you tonight, I thought I would just offer a handful of different kinds of formative elements that made a difference in the lives of the people that I interviewed. And they also probably have made a difference in your life, and helping us to think about how we take advantage of all of the blessings

and the opportunities, the gifts that God has given us, to try and make a positive difference in the world in which God has placed us.

Michael Lindsey: [06:53](#) I'm Southern Baptist, so I believe in alliteration. So the first is custom. Now you hear custom, I mean really about the habits of your life. What are the practices that are in the daily, weekly, monthly, and annual routines of our life, so that we can begin to get a sense of how it is that we try to live out our faith in our busy, demanding professional lives.

Michael Lindsey: [07:19](#) Ralph Larson served as the CEO of Johnson and Johnson. Extraordinary man. In that job, he would travel all over the world. But Ralph made a commitment that he wanted to be able to continue to nurture his kids as an engaged dad. It's amazing how difficult it can be sometimes, just to try and get that balance right. And so, he made a commitment that, in his house, they were going to treat Sunday as truly a sabbath. And he was going to work really hard to be available for worship on Sunday morning, and then they would have pizza night on Sunday nights as a family. It did not matter where he had to be on Monday, he worked really hard to be home on Sunday. And that became part of their weekly routine.

Michael Lindsey: [08:02](#) I found that many examples of folks who built these kind of practices in their life ... It's interesting, because I've found it's entirely possible to have a very demanding job, and to also have a very engaged family life. Now, there may not be time for a lot of other things, hobbies, other kinds of activities, but you can do both. And there's certain things that you can do that make a difference. One of them is that kids crave routine. They long for habits and rituals.

Michael Lindsey: [08:30](#) It's almost sort of like we are made for liturgy in our lives, and you have to build those kind of practices in your daily life. Spiritual disciplines and having them in your family life, how do you become the kind of leader that you are proud of at the end of your life? So that you pursue not just the resume virtues, as David Brooks talks about, but also the eulogy virtues, the virtues that you would want people to say when you've passed?

Michael Lindsey: [08:57](#) It starts with the customs that we build into our life, the practices and the habits. We also are blessed by the coaches that come along, the mentors, the people who speak into our life. Probably one of the most intimidating interviews that I have is with Colin Powell. I don't know how many of you have

met General Powell or heard him speak, he's a big man, broad shouldered, tall.

- Michael Lindsey: [09:18](#) We sat down and we were around this very small little conference table. I had sent him some material about the White House Fellowship, which I was focusing my research around. It's an amazing program that's educated folks early in their career, where they get professional development opportunities working directly with senior officers in the government.
- Michael Lindsey: [09:35](#) And he said, "Michael, before we get started in this whole interview, I gotta tell you, I read all the materials that you sent me in advance about your research and the study. And I don't know how to tell you this, but I really pretty much find this whole line of work you've been about for several years is worthless."
- Michael Lindsey: [09:54](#) They don't teach you in Grad school what to say when your informant says that to you In the beginning. Fortunately I had the presence of mind to just say, "That's interesting, General Powell, say more."
- Michael Lindsey: [10:03](#) And he said, "Well listen, I'm not even sure you could say I'm a leader. My wife certainly doesn't see me as a leader. So, I'm not sure that other people should see me as a leader. And even if he could say that I'm a leader, what's to say what worked for me would work for somebody else? And even if you could say what worked for me will work for somebody else, let's just say you're gonna be able to figure it out in the hour that we spend together. And then if you could, how could you directly apply it to somebody else's life? And you talked about this White House Fellowship being a big deal."
- Michael Lindsey: [10:28](#) He says, "Look, that was just one year among many years. It really wasn't that significant." He said, "I really don't know why we're even here."
- Michael Lindsey: [10:39](#) At that moment I thought about saying, "I understand, thank you very much for your time." But I have read every single word of his autobiography, and providentially in that moment, I remembered the section where he talked about this time when he was a White House Fellow, and he had described it as a turning point.
- Michael Lindsey: [10:57](#) And I said, "I really think it was a turning point." He said, "Oh, well, it was one of many turning points." And I said, "Well, if I

might, General Powell, it was in that year as a White House fellow you went to the work directly for Frank Carlucci, who at the time was the head of the office of Management and Budget. You formed a close personal relationship with him where he became a mentor, really a coach in your life.

Michael Lindsey: [11:18](#) I remember in 1981 when he was chosen as National Security Advisor, he handpicked you to be his deputy, even though James Baker and Ed Niece and others had said General Powell was not the right person. He chose you. In 1985 when he stepped down as National Security Advisor, many people were vying for that job, but you got it, because Frank Carlucci spoke up on your behalf, and said to the president, you are the man for the job.

Michael Lindsey: [11:43](#) Most people say that in that four years when you were National Security Advisor, you formed a very close relationship with George HW Bush, so that when you all were executing on the first Gulf War and you served as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of staff, you had tremendous access in the White House, in ways that other folks in the military brass had never experienced. Most people say you never would [intapped 00:12:05] a secretary of state by his son, if you had not forged that close relationship with the father and had both experience of being in the military, and also policy experience in the White House."

Michael Lindsey: [12:16](#) "General Powell," I said, "Look at your life. The relationship you formed with Frank Carlucci as a 30 year old, it changed the direction of your career. It wasn't just a turning point, it was the turning point."

Michael Lindsey: [12:29](#) He said, "well, maybe you've got a point, let's do the interview." Actually, I learned that General Powell has a habit of trying to sort of get journalists off their balance early on, and he was just pulling a little trick on me. He actually recognized that the formative influence Frank Carlucci had played in his life, it changed who he was as a man. My hunch is that each of us, if given the time, could go around the room and share the story of one, two, three or four folks, maybe they're in our family, oftentimes they're not, Who played a formative role at a critical moment in our lives and shaped who we became.

Michael Lindsey: [13:09](#) I found that to be the case for every single person I interviewed. 550 people, each of whom could name at least one coach who made a key difference. I also found that challenges have a way of shaping our leadership in profound ways. The interesting

thing is, oftentimes leaders can't always tell the full story of the challenge.

Michael Lindsey: [13:30](#) Nan Cohan was the first woman to be president of Duke University. Prior to that, she served as president of Wellesley, her Alma Mater. When she was president of Wellesley, it was in the 1980s, when the apartheid movement was getting increasing pressure in South Africa. Divestment practices were being picked up in lots of places, and a group of Wellesley students began to put pressure on the board of trustees at Wellesley for them to divest holdings in the endowment that were invested in South Africa. Originally when the students came to the board and presented, Nan Cohan said, "I really wasn't persuaded, I'm a political scientist and I recognize that it's complex in how these decisions are made."

Michael Lindsey: [14:11](#) But she said, "The students begin working on me. They would meet with me time and again, we would talk and converse. And I recognize, they maybe had a point, and that Wellesley might be well-situated to help move the dial on the higher education sector. And because so many of the institutions like Wellesley did have significant endowments, that could begin to put additional pressure to bring about social change, a change that I personally thought it would be a good thing for the people of South Africa."

Michael Lindsey: [14:37](#) She said, "So I began to develop a plan to brief the board, and then to bring it back up for a full board vote." And while she was doing that, she would engage the students. The time came for the board meeting and she said, "I stood up there to to make the case," and she said, "Rarely does the president really advocate to the board to do something. Normally we're recommending, but we're not making like a strong argument."

Michael Lindsey: [15:00](#) But she said, "I gave it my all. I went out there, I just explained to them why I thought this was important," and she said, "I thought I had the votes. But, actually as it turned, out I didn't. Took the vote, and the decision was to take no action whatsoever. And then it was my unhappy responsibility to go and tell the students what the board had done. They gathered out on the front steps in the main administration building where the board typically meets."

Michael Lindsey: [15:27](#) She said, "I went out to go greet them," and she said, "They were all listening on baited breath, and then after I had spoken for a few minutes, they recognized that they were not going to

get what they wanted." And then she said, "Somebody said something out loud, and then suddenly the whole crowd just dispersed."

Michael Lindsey: [15:45](#) And she said, "I knew it couldn't be that easy. I wasn't sure what was going on. But what had happened, is that they had decided that if they didn't get the decision they wanted, they were just going to become human blockades at every one of the exits on campus. Because, you see, the trustees have parked on the campus and so they weren't going to be able to leave."

Michael Lindsey: [16:03](#) So these enterprising female students at Wellesley, they would just lay down on the road so that the trustees would never be able to leave. And she said, "After an hour or two we thought, this is a good act of civil disobedience and we understand it." But she said, "After four or five hours, the trustees are saying it's time to go." And she said, "We tried everything."

Michael Lindsey: [16:24](#) She said, "I tried to reason with them, I used every tool in my arsenal, but in the end I could not persuade them." And she said, "So finally, we actually had to have them arrested. And because there were so many of them, they could not process them at the local jail, the only place where they could take them, where they could process 150 Wellesley students, just happened to be a maximum security prison that was about 20 miles from their campus."

Michael Lindsey: [16:50](#) And she said, "This is not the image that the Wellesley president wants for their leadership." And she said, "The thing that really got to me is that I so desperately wanted to tell them, I'm on your side. I actually was advocating for you. But I can't do that, because the president's job is to do the bidding of the board. And what's said in the board room stays in the board room."

Michael Lindsey: [17:16](#) It's interesting, because over the course of all the interviews that I conducted, leaders were able to give very poignant stories about real challenges that they face, moments where they really thought that they could turn the tide, and for one reason or another they could not. And here's the interesting thing, whether you work in the White House, or Wall Street or Silicon Valley, or Hollywood, if you're in the local elementary school, or a biotech startup, I have become convinced that the most effective leadership that actually occurs today, is rarely seen.

Michael Lindsey: [17:54](#) It's because great leaders are typically trying to do one of two things. Either they're trying to create partnerships or



opportunities that, for one reason or another, is really good and positive, but it falls apart at the last minute. So a leader doesn't go around and say, "I just spent the last three months trying to get a merger here. It was a really great idea, but it fell apart and we just sort of move on." Leaders also spend a lot of time trying to keep bad things from becoming worse, and you never talk about those things. I became convinced that a leader's best work rarely sees the light of day. That's, in some ways, the toll of leading. You don't always get the credit.

Dustin Moody: [18:43](#)

In addition to the customs, the coaches, and the challenges that leaders face, Michael also shares about the role of confidence in the role of crisis in leadership formation. If you'd like to hear more from Michael, you can purchase his book, *View From The Top*, which we'll link to from our show notes page, but you can also hear the rest of his presentation at our new course at [scatter.org](http://scatter.org).

Dustin Moody: [19:01](#)

The three lessons in this free course will walk you through each of Michael's pillars of leadership, and the course includes some guided reflection questions to help you consider your own leadership role, and identify potential areas for growth and personal development. Check out [scatter.org](http://scatter.org) to learn more, create your free account, and get started. As always, thanks for listening to the Faith And Work Podcast. If you enjoy what you heard today, share this podcast with a friend and subscribe on the podcast platform of your choice. We hope you'll join us again for the next episode of the Faith And Work Podcast.