

Engage360 Episode 139 | Adaptive Leadership: Finding Perspective and Embracing Change; Dr. Angie Ward

[00:00:16] **Tim Koller:** Hi, friends. Welcome to Engage360, Denver Seminary's podcast. I'm your host, Dr. Tim Koller. Thank you for joining us for today's conversation. I am delighted to have my mentor, my friend, my colleague, Dr. Angie Ward here on the podcast of Engage360. Dr. Angie Ward is the Director of the Doctor of Ministry here at Denver Seminary. She teaches leadership and a variety of topics for the Seminary. You hear her on the podcast with some regularity. So, Dr. Ward, thank you for coming and being a guest on the podcast.

[00:00:45] **Angie Ward:** Yeah, it's fun to be here on the other side of the table, I guess.

[00:00:49] **Tim Koller:** Yes, indeed. And I'm so delighted that I'm the one that gets to interview you about your book, *Uncharted Leadership*. You are an author, a speaker, you're a professor, you're a mother, you're a wife, you do so many really fantastic things. And I want to talk today about your book, *Uncharted Leadership*, why you wrote it, what we should be learning from this, and just to have some fun as we engage in this really interesting conversation of leadership.

[00:01:17] **Angie Ward:** Let's do it.

[00:01:18] **Tim Koller:** As we hop into this, I'm really curious: you have written several other books across your career, and so what were you seeing in your work as a seminary professor, as a leader of a Doctor of Ministry program, as a church practitioner? What were the things that you were observing that led you to begin writing this book?

[00:01:38] **Angie Ward:** Yeah. Great question. And first, let me tell just a little bit more about the book. The subtitle is actually *20 Case Studies to Help Ministry Leaders Adapt to Uncertainty*. So it's a case study book, 20 case studies as the subtitle says, and I wrote it partly just as an outworking of what I'm doing in our Doctor of Ministry classroom, and you teach for us as well, and you know, we get people who say "I never learned such and such in seminary" or "I'm facing this challenge in my ministry and I never got taught this, never learned that" and that's because seminary is designed to teach you certain things. And even leadership, it's designed to teach you certain things. But you get to a certain stage in your leadership journey and ministry experience where you move into what are called "adaptive challenges," and we can talk more about that in a moment.

But seminary, that's when there's intersection, a synthesis of all the different things you learned. And it's hard to teach that in one course, so I wrote this book of case studies, and they're all completely real-life case studies. Many of them from my or my husband's own ministry experience, or some of our students and other pastors I know. The case study method is known for being a great teaching tool. And so by putting real life situations there, and then helping readers think through it without giving the neat resolution or "this is how you need to do it," it's taking what we do in our doctoral classroom to ministry leaders who can read this book and apply it, even if the situations aren't identical to what you might be facing, but the main issues often are, and the questions you need to be asking are the same. And so, this helps you think, well, how would I do it in this situation? Or what could they have done differently? What could we do differently? So, we're not in the next case study book.

[00:03:32] **Tim Koller:** That's fantastic. So, our goal is to not have to be in the next case study book, but we're going to encounter scenarios that are going to challenge us to become the kind of leader

who can solve that more difficult challenge than we previously had training for. So, there's this gap between our existing skillset and the skillset required to meet this adaptive challenge that we've faced. So, were you seeing this happen to your students? Were you seeing this happen in your own ministry practitioners at your local church? What was going on that said, I'm going to go do this case study book? Because the environment needs this. What was stirring up in you that caused this book to be generated?

[00:04:14] **Angie Ward:** Yeah. I think yes to all your questions about where it came about. First, just in our own real-life ministry, my husband and I, over 25 years of ministry and leadership, we were going, where do we find help for this? How do we think through this stuff? And seeing it also in the classroom and the Doctor of Ministry classroom. Our students largely are in their late 30s through 50s. And so, they're at a point in their leadership journey and just overall experience where they're seeing stuff again. They go, "I didn't I didn't train for this in seminary." We may unpack a little bit more of this later, but the concept behind the book is adaptive leadership.

And these cases are adaptive challenges. Like you said, there's a gap between what you already know what you need or, the way the authors behind adaptive leadership talk about technical challenges are ones that are like, you've been there before, or there's a known challenge, solution, or playbook, even if it's a complex one. So, a church or Denver Seminary, like a big capital campaign or a building program, some of those are very complex things, but they're still generally technical challenges. There are steps that we know and some best practices, but then you get into adaptive challenges. And those are the ones where it's like, we've never been here before, or combine so many different concepts, or the emotional part of the people-piece of it complicates the whole thing, because you're looking at complex systems. I think another thing is where, we're seeing this more and more in the world that we live in, is that the ground is shifting beneath our feet, not just within the systems in the environments that we're working in and leading in.

And so, we're just off-balance and going, how do we do this? And so, again, I wrote the book, kind of saying, well, I've got a lot of great stories. Like I said, many of them don't resolve neatly. But I thought, well, if we can turn this into a teaching tool, not just for classrooms and seminaries and colleges, but really for any pastors or their leadership teams or mastermind groups or coaching groups to read through, to hopefully learn some adaptive awareness and capacity from other cases.

[00:06:39] **Tim Koller:** It's so helpful to hear other people's stories, partly because you just don't feel as alone when you begin to recognize other people are facing really complex challenges as well. So, are you finding in reception, now that the book has been out for several months, are you finding that people are resonating with these stories and not feeling as lonely in their leadership?

[00:07:00] **Angie Ward:** Yes, not feeling as lonely. Sometimes they actually say, whew, I thought my situation was bad, and then I read this one in the book. Because there are some pretty complex things in there. I've been asked to guest lecture sometimes over Zoom for different schools, different groups, classes. And they'll start talking about which ones resonate. They say, I was in a situation just like this, has been so helpful, you know, just because there was no guidance or no tools to guide them through it. That's another part of it because there are no known solutions. You can't just go to a book and say, well, step 1, step 2. And so, this is, I think, giving some language sometimes to what are the underlying issues and what questions do we even ask? What are the real issues? Because a lot of times, adaptive challenges, it's hard to even determine at first, what is the real issue?

And with my Doctor of Ministry students in their thesis work, they're having to identify an obstacle or opportunity in their ministry. We spend a lot of time just kind of workshoping that because we tend to go, well, the problem is this and we want it to be a technical problem with a technical solution. And then we start digging and go, okay, the real problem is, that started this many years ago, or involves this many people or these dynamics, or even some things we're not even aware of yet. And so, I think this helps people just dig deeper to that next level.

[00:08:31] **Tim Koller:** Yes, absolutely. I know in the students that I've worked with using this book, they have found it to be really challenging for them to now take the theory and some of the ideas, some of the leadership axioms, the things that make leadership seem simple, and now they're having to apply it to really complex situations, and it is forcing them to have to address the gap in their understanding to say, oh, wow, I thought it was just, I said this, they should go do that. And now they're beginning to recognize not just communication theory about how we can communicate more effectively, but actually being able to enter into an adaptive challenge is not just a cognitive process. It's an emotional process, and it's going to challenge some of the things that are deeply loved sometimes, in myself or in the organizations that we're part of. So, as you've been processing this work and as you're going through the case studies, I'm curious how much you're recognizing the role of the emotional process of the leader, not just the cognitive process of a leader.

[00:09:34] **Angie Ward:** Yeah. I think the emotional is what makes it so complicated. You know, there's this saying we say sometimes, "ministry would be easy if it weren't for the people." It's not just these easy situations on paper or, it's one thing to write a paper for your class or my class on a leadership theory or to do a book summary, but then to put all that together, when there's so much resistance to change with the people around us and, like you said, a lot of times, primarily internally. And like you said, we go, well just do this. We want people to be technical and it's all adaptive, and when you get to that level, that's where I talk about leadership being a gift, a skill, and an art, and the art of that is understanding all that nuance of the systems, the emotional dynamics, the space between people and then it suddenly becomes this very complex thing, instead of just insert tab A into slot B and boy, your problem is solved.

[00:10:37] **Tim Koller:** Yes, it's so much more difficult when you're actually leading people as opposed to just reading a text. So, part of this is having to learn to be in relationship with people around us. And as we think about adaptive leadership, I'd like to move into, what is adaptive leadership? It gives us some stages. It talks about, you know, regulating the temperature and the holding environment.

So, let's unpack that just a little bit together because I think it's valuable just to give a general construct of what this is. And as we think about the adaptive leadership challenge, part of what I'm recognizing in my own leadership is my propensity to try to oversimplify things because adaptive leadership, part of it is actually saying, hey, Tim Koller, you're going to need to learn, grow, and adapt that this is not something you have the existing skill set to do. And it is imploring me to enter into, with humility, a change process. For me, not just them. Cause I think as a leader, we can get deceived into thinking they need to change as though I'm somehow exempt from that. So, I'm curious as you're wrestling with this idea of adaptive leadership, how are you processing the need for you to learn, to grow, to adapt?

[00:11:58] **Angie Ward:** Yeah, well, I'm in a season of where I've sought out some additional leadership coaching just to grow in this area, and I'm reading so many helpful books right now. But one of them talks about how we have all these internal assumptions or mindsets that are keeping us from the very change, making us immune to the very change that we want to bring about in our

systems or organizations. And so, I've been having to wrestle with my own thing of, it all rests on me. Part of me says, I want to delegate leadership. I want to give away. I want to empower other people. And yet I have this deeply rooted, it all rests on me, I can't truly trust anybody else, you know, or I'm a failure if I don't do it all. There are all these reasons behind these messages. Robert Kegan in his book, *Immunity to Change*, talks about how you have one foot on the gas and one foot on the brake. And Robert Quinn in his book, *Deep Change*, just talks about how you're either constantly changing, or you're in slow death.

And that's not just our groups or organizations. That's us. And so if we're not willing to go there first, I mean, your willingness to go there and to be authentic and transparent through that process, and honest through that, is what builds the trust that helps you then bring other people on that journey with you, instead of this old model of leadership, this top down, one-person-at-the-top kind of thing. You know, you and I firmly believe we lead out of who we are. It's not just what we do, or the skill set. And when you get to the adaptive level or, you know, we've seen leaders who coast on giftedness, and there comes a point where you have to manage the emotional side and understand that and understand it in your own life. Because like you said, like it's one thing to read a case and even this book, you could read it and say, well, they should just do that. That's easy. But when you're sitting there you've got groups of people coming up to you and you feel like a failure either way? What that does to you internally into your psyche, I mean, you've got to work through all that stuff and that's not just a matter of "go away and go do this."

[00:14:16] **Tim Koller:** Absolutely. And part of our understanding of emotions is that we're not going to be able to genuinely express an emotion towards someone else unless we have it within ourselves. So, I can't be empathetic towards someone else unless I have empathy within me. So, part of our work, and I love the Gospel in articulating that "we love because He first loved us." And so, the origin of this is actually being centered on the person of Jesus. And so, as we center more on the person of Jesus and root our identity and formation out of Jesus, now it can overflow to others. But what I find is that people get caught in very anxious systems where they are just stuck trying harder. They're stuck trying to realize a technical challenge when it actually is an adaptive challenge. And so, they get caught on this treadmill where they're running as fast as they can, they are getting tired and even burnt out. And it's partly because the solution is not in trying harder. It's in reframing the problem.

[00:15:16] **Angie Ward:** And sometimes not only is it an adaptive challenge instead of a technical challenge, it's an adaptive challenge in your own life. And we want to externalize it and keep it out there. And we want these systems to be, we want things to just be technical. And you just follow this manual and do that. And it's just a whole lot messier than most of the books write about, certainly the leadership books of, you know, 15, 20, 30 years ago wrote about, because that was all like manufacturing and increasing output. And we have been reminded, oh yeah, humans are complex creatures. And you have to take all that into account, and we're fallen and sinful just like the people we're trying to lead.

[00:16:07] **Tim Koller:** I love Diane Langberg when she articulates in her book, *Redeeming Power*, that even though you're a shepherd, you're still a sheep because Jesus is the head, not us. And I think it's helpful for us to recognize that all power we have as leaders is derivative. None of it is ours. It's been stewarded to us. And so I know you are a fan of Andy Stanley's talk that he gave many, many years ago at Catalyst. Do you remember the quote?

[00:16:32] **Angie Ward:** "Leadership is a stewardship. It is temporary, and you will be accountable." Is that it?

[00:16:38] **Tim Koller:** That's the one. It's rooted in there.

[00:16:41] **Angie Ward:** Yep. Yeah. Yeah.

[00:16:43] **Tim Koller:** But I think it's a really helpful reminder as we go into these that we, as fallen, sinful people, we can be in self-deception and not see clearly, but we also can get caught up in very anxious systems where we are not seeing clearly the environment that we're in and we can find ourselves being run ragged, not because we're actually solving the problem, but because we're keeping busy, and busyness does not equal importance, even though many of us as leaders are very much action-oriented. We want to be people who are a bias for action. We're going to go solve this. So when we start to find ourselves getting tired as leaders, one of the things adaptive leadership tells us is that we should look for the gap between espoused values and behaviors. And you did your dissertation looking at organizational culture and looking at Shine's work on organizational culture. And we don't need to go down that rabbit hole. Trail entirely, but I mean, you get if you want.

[00:17:38] **Angie Ward:** Just kidding. You've heard enough of it.

[00:17:39] **Tim Koller:** But I'm curious, as you are looking at this work of adaptive leadership, that's one of the first stages is to recognize that there's a gap between espoused values and behavior. I'm curious, as you're thinking about that, how does a leader begin to recognize that gap? Because the anxiety in the system might be making it that we can't see that there's a gap. So how do we begin to identify that there is a gap between the espoused values and the actual behavior?

[00:18:07] **Angie Ward:** Yeah, that's a great question. My interest in this was first in this whole idea of adaptive leadership and these gaps and all that stuff and organizational culture was when I was a youth ministry leader. I was working at a camp, and I would see that youth groups took on the personality of their leaders. And then when we worked at a church later, out of graduating from Denver Seminary, then I would see churches would have these mission statements on the wall, and it wasn't the real thing, you know, as Andy Stanley would say, "happening down the hall," you know, and so seeing that disconnect. So, I think one of the keys, Ron Heifetz, you know, talks about adaptive leadership is a "balcony view."

So, one is getting enough distance so that you can see the whole situation. But I think a part of that is, you know, like Bowen and others were talking about that healthy differentiation. So, you're engaged in it, but not caught up in it. And there's better definitions. That's, you know, my terms for it. So, you don't want to be so distant that you're just reading someone else's case study. Because you need to be emotionally engaged with it as well, but you have to not be consumed by it, where you're taking it so personally. So, I think one of the things they say is, you know, okay, what is the, what is the real challenge here? But to do that, you have to get some emotional distance from it. And again, if you're not willing to go, okay, why is this stirring this up within me? And to then be able to separate your reactions and where that's coming from, it's just going to be fuzzy because you're so close to it and so affected by it emotionally and you've got so much in it. So, I mean, that's just such hard work, to not just completely disengage and go I'm just going to treat this like some all-outside kind of thing, or to be so in it that everything is personal, and you can't see where the real gaps are, including the ones that might be in your life.

[00:20:13] **Tim Koller:** Absolutely. Our friend Harv Powers says that the cognitive and the emotional are both needed in the leadership process. And it's like the depth perception of our eyes. We need cognitive and emotional and being able to appreciate both of them. So, as we think about adaptive

leadership and being able to recognize the difference between espoused values and behaviors, getting off the dance floor and getting up onto the balcony is a requirement for these leaders. But a healthy differentiation is going to require us to be able to remain close to ourselves and close to others in the times of high anxiety and tension. But you mentioned earlier that you bring people into your life to help you think about those things. Some of our leaders are thinking they should be solo leaders, that they should be smart enough to figure it out all on their own. But you, at the level of leadership you have, the level of influence you have, you yourself still have individuals that are peers, that are colleagues, that are mentors, people that are guiding you on the process. So, can you just speak a little bit to how those individuals that you invite into your life are helping you get off the dance floor and get onto the balcony?

[00:21:20] **Angie Ward:** Yes. Yeah, that's great. It's been a really stretching process, but so good for me. But I think I want to just identify a myth that's guided leadership, the industry, if you will, and that myth is that there's an arrival point, and that leaders at some point need to have all the answers. You and I have done a different podcast where we talked about the responsibility of followership, and not delegating all of that authority and responsibility on someone else. And so, I think we first have to disabuse ourselves of that idea that, I will get to a point where I don't need more help, or I don't need to grow, or I've gotten it all because I've got a Ph.D. and I teach at Denver Seminary or whatever. I'm wired as just a lifelong learner and self-motivated. You know, I'm no pain, no gain. I have someone close to me who says, "no pain, no pain." Our friend, Dr. Harv Powers, we'll talk about, you kind of get to these landings, or an inflection point, where you're effective for a while, but then you have to level up and go to the next thing. And that takes stretching and growth. And that's the other thing we, internally and externally, systems seek stability. But there's not growth when there's stability. You change from that disequilibrium, being pulled and stretched. And I'm fortunate you and I get to work at Denver Seminary where we have so many great colleagues that we can talk with and bounce things off. We speak the same language in a lot of ways. My doctoral students, they're my students, but there's so much wisdom in our classrooms. Lately I've been engaging a longtime mentor as a leadership coach through some formal assessments. And as part of that was, and you were one of these, filled out 360-degree assessments.

So, I asked a bunch of people, instead of just looking in the mirror, and saying, well, I hope I see this. There's a lot of things I can't see in my own mirror. And so, I had to ask you and others, how do you perceive me? And then, be honest and not defensive and accept that, you know, and sometimes I rated myself more harshly than everybody else did. Other times, there were things I didn't see or wasn't aware of and areas I could step into. In fact, in our DMin. program, in our new curriculum, we've added a mentored formation component, because training and mentoring is a key component of a Denver Seminary education at the master's level. And again, there was kind of this idea, well, you know, at the doctoral level, these people are the mentors. But we never outgrow our need for growth and for mentoring. And it may look different. It's maybe more peer-to-peer now, you know, because there is a point where some people get to where there's very few who resonate exactly and have been in the exact same spot as far as situations, but that's where people who have walked that internal journey, become even more important.

[00:24:32] **Tim Koller:** Absolutely. I love that you're saying we're never outgrowing the need to grow as leaders. We are signing up for the need to put ourselves humbly into a process of growth and adaptive leadership does not happen by accident. It required the intentionality of the leader. To recognize the need to grow and to build for themselves what I call a constellation of mentors. It's a group of people that you can contact. And so, a couple of weeks ago I had a leadership situation in my life where I was going, I need the wisdom of my mentors. And so, I reached out to one of my mentors and they weren't available. And so, I went down the Rolodex to the next one and called

them. And so, you have to develop a bench, you have to develop people you can go to. So. If we're going to be able to recognize that adaptive leadership is needed, we're going to have to recognize the difference between espoused values and behaviors, and it's not something that we, solo, are necessarily going to be able to do. And it talks about the second type of adaptive challenge exists when there are competing commitments within the group or organization. Can you speak a little bit to what a competing commitment might look like or how you've seen that at work? Okay.

[00:25:40] **Angie Ward:** Yeah, the competing commitment thing. I think this the gap between the espoused and actual, sometimes you can go, well, we have espoused, we've said this and we can see clearly this, but when you get to the gap or the competing commitments, then you're digging even deeper into like people's emotions that these assumptions and beliefs that each of us hold that are so deeply rooted and so deeply held that to behave otherwise by someone else seems unthinkable, but they're so deeply held that we're not even aware or can't even articulate them. And so, I tell my students, you see that a lot of times if you have a church membership meeting or any type of conflict, most of the time, it's those types of competing commitments.

And in the, in the book, in the *Uncharted Leadership* book, there are several cases where, "who won?" You know, like was it a good outcome? Well, it completely depends on where you were sitting in the situation. And so, something that may be good for one person or one party maybe not beneficial to another, and how do you navigate all that? And then the emotion that comes with all that, it stirs in you for being caught in the middle, or maybe you side with one or the other and all the people that bring all their emotional stuff into the whole thing. It's messy. I've said that before. It's messy.

[00:27:09] **Tim Koller:** It's messy. And there are these competing commitments, and greatness can actually come out of dealing with the conflict between those competing commitments. How are we going to be a cost-effective organization while having excellent service? And those kinds of tensions are difficult to manage, and it requires us to be able to sit into those tensions to a very significant degree, but if we don't have the emotional capacity to do it, we're going to flee from those situations very quickly. So, we've talked about recognizing that gap. We've talked about being able to recognize that there are competing commitments, but then there's the third type of adaptive challenge that is speaking the unspeakable. And this is one where you actually carry an elephant with you.

[00:27:53] **Angie Ward:** Yeah. I was just going to say, I was just telling someone in a meeting today. They said, oh, were you in Africa? Did you get this? Like, I have a stuffed elephant. Dr. Koller knows you can't see it behind my shoulder, but it's a stuffed elephant that the mentor, who's actually doing my leadership coaching, he would bring a stuffed elephant named Carl. He named it Carl. I don't know why. He'd bring it into the room and in a group of elders or leaders, and he would say, okay, this is Carl. This is the elephant in the room. I'm calling it out. And we are now going to talk about Carl. Name the elephant in the room. So, I was teaching this to another group of leaders. And at the end of that experience, they bought me this cute little stuffed elephant and it says "Hi, my name is Carl" on it. And so, it's on my shelf as a great conversation starter, usually just talking about the concept, but sometimes you've got to put the elephant right in there and say, okay. We're gonna say the things that either people have gotten punished or othered for saying. I mean, just that radical transparency about what's really going on. Max Dupree talks about the first responsibility of the leader is to define reality. And part of that is bringing that elephant, bringing Carl into the middle of the table and saying, okay, out with it. What what's really going on? What are you really thinking and feeling? Not playing pretend and being honest about where everything's at.

[00:29:26] **Tim Koller:** And the difficulty as a leader is being emotionally regulated enough that you can create a psychologically safe environment where people feel like they can speak the unspeakable. Because if we have an explosive response to the first person who raises a concern, no one else in the room is going to talk. And so, we carry an authority if we're the one with the authority. But even within the system, if you're not the one with the authority in the room, you still feel the tension of the elephant in the room. And are we actually allowed to talk about this thing that all of us know, but none of us actually want to articulate out loud? So, when we encounter that, we might be in an adaptive challenge. And the fourth one of these, I find this one incredibly fascinating, is work avoidance, these diversionary tactics that we use to avoid specific work. So, could you speak a little bit to work avoidance?

[00:30:16] **Angie Ward:** Yes, and I would say, we read that, and you think it's just technical work avoidance. Like, I just don't want to do my job. But it's really about that hard adaptive stuff, some of the hard internal stuff. I've been in systems where, you mentioned earlier, this idea of a holding area or holding container for this tension, and if we can't hold that ourselves, we want to push that on someone else. And so, we want to avoid that work and make someone else fix it, handle it, handle it, handle it. That's a Barney Fife thing that my husband was talking about, from Andy Griffith. So, work avoidance, you know, everybody wants the results of the change or the benefits of it. And no one wants to go through those challenges and those changes and those redemptive experiences because they're hard and they're messy. We want everyone else; we want our church to grow, but without us being uncomfortable, without our routine being shifted. We want the other people to change. We don't want us to have to do that. Whether we're the person, you know, on the ground or the person charged with leading and stewarding that, and so being willing to face that challenge right on and holding that tension. I feel like this is the Andy Stanley Quote Show, but he talks about, "some things are tensions to be managed not problems to be solved." And so, we can become more comfortable with holding those tensions within ourselves. Then we can also create space for the people we're working with to have these holding places for these tensions. And sometimes there's not a solution where it's a one-or-the-other or a win-lose. You have to hold these tensions.

[00:31:59] **Tim Koller:** Absolutely. So, if we encounter the reality that we have adaptive challenges that we are facing this in our organization or on our team, part of the work then is to get on the balcony to get some distance from the problem and be able to actually see, what's the reality of our situation? And then the second stage after you get on the balcony is to identify those adaptive challenges. And we've made some reference to this already, but after you've identified what specifically the adaptive challenges are, now you have to regulate distress, and this is where that language of being able to walk with people to maintain those connections or those attachments to people become part of the challenges that we face. So, when you've been in these kinds of adaptive challenges, they talk about having this, this holding environment. What does that look like for you in your leadership? Are you working more with individuals, are you convening groups of people together? How are you approaching regulating distress in the midst of adaptive challenge?

[00:33:01] **Angie Ward:** Oh, that's a good question. In my work, I do both. I'm part of a system that you and I are both higher-ed, the academy, which is slower-moving than the church, which is way slower-moving than a lot of more agile organizations. So, there's always this resistance. And you have to go through these processes, or I need to sign off, and there's just so many internal tensions or anxiety that people bring to it. And so, I mean, my first step, like I said before, is just trying to go, okay, what if I start getting agitated, where is that coming from, and trying to regulate it in myself first. And that, to be honest, takes a lot of energy sometimes, or just reflective time.

[00:33:50] **Tim Koller:** Yeah. Curiosity.

[00:33:52] **Angie Ward:** Curiosity, right, exactly. And we feel like, oh man, I got to do the thing or get the thing done, but it'll get done better, and ultimately faster and healthier, if you take that time to do that. With students, it's helping them navigate their competing commitments. "My commitment is I want to get an A, but I also am a pastor and I have to work 50 hours a week and I can't give that much time." And so, modeling, regulating my own distress and then helping that. A lot of times it's in mentoring situation in a classroom, or one-on-one, or with small groups of leaders who are wanting to learn this stuff.

[00:34:36] **Tim Koller:** That's so good. And I think it's important that we come up with a strategy for how we're going to regulate distress for ourselves and for the people we're with, because the next step of an adaptive leader is to actually maintain disciplined attention, that in the midst of all of the turmoil that your organization will have all the tyranny of the urgent, you have to maintain disciplined attention. So, I'm curious, are there strategies that we can utilize to maintain disciplined attention?

[00:35:01] **Angie Ward:** I think maintaining disciplined attention is related to being able to manage tension. So, I mean, if you can't sit with that tension, you're going to constantly be going, oh, look, here's a release valve. Here's something that won't keep us focused on this thing. I think in the beginning, people have a lot of energy for change or the work that needs to be done or at least enthusiasm for the results, but then it gets hard and then it doesn't go as fast as we want. Something I see a lot with ministry leaders is, they spent a year, two years, three years, or at least multiple months talking about change within their system or within their organization, and then they expect that they're just going to communicate it like that, and there's going to be this espoused value and everybody's going to follow along, and not allowing the time for everybody to come along with that. But not drift away from it, say we, we're going to give it space. We're staying. I think we could err one of two ways: one is to just force it, force it forward, and the other is just go, yeah, you're right, this is hard. We're just gonna let you do whatever you want. And I think that's where a lot of leaders stop. Because it's harder, much harder, much longer than they thought it would be and much harder, much longer for themselves internally than they thought would be, and frankly, it's easier to just let things ride or to just push and force because we get frustrated.

[00:36:40] **Tim Koller:** It is fascinating to see as leaders that we can become embittered toward the people we were called to shepherd and lead. And one of the challenges is to actually be a hopeful leader. Romans 15:13 says that we can actually "overflow with hope." And that is a promise that leaders can actually hold on to. But part of this work then as an adaptive leader, after you've maintained disciplined attention, you got on the balcony, you identify the adaptive challenge, you regulate distress, you maintain disciplined attention on that adaptive challenge. And now you give the work back to the people. And this is fascinating because as a leader, I'm supposed to be the one that has it all figured out. And I'm the one that takes the credit and the success, right?

[00:37:19] **Angie Ward:** Right. Exactly. Well, and that speaks to the thing that I've identified as my foot on the brake, which is it all rests on me. Now I came by that honestly, you know, if I told you all about more of my story you'd be like, well, of course, that's why that's the message that you have. And people want someone to take that on and so we create this perfect, horrible system where, I feel obligated to take it all on, and you feel very happy to give it to me and not take any on yourself, and the adaptive challenge is helping other people stretch and grow as well. And creating that adaptive capacity in them, not just identifying it and going, now I'm going to take care of it for you. We're all being stretched together.

[00:38:10] **Tim Koller:** It's almost as though we're trying to reject that drama triangle where we create victims and heroes and villains. And so, we create a villain in the story, and I tell you you're a victim, so I can be your hero. And so, the drama triangle shows up in this. And I think one of the things adaptive leadership does so well is it says, there is no drama triangle. This is a work that we are doing together. Participate with me. I love Todd Bolsinger's language of "energizing a community." So, this is not just about a singular, sole hero. This is us doing the work together.

[00:38:41] **Angie Ward:** Yes. And that brings us to the last task as far as leading through adaptive change and challenges: protect the leadership voices from below, giving everyone a voice. And that doesn't mean everyone makes the decisions, but everyone has a voice. In the example I gave, you have a bunch of leaders sitting in a room and they're completely separated, you know, and the bigger the system is, the harder it is to have accurate information on the ground. And you and I were talking just last week about the idea of skip-level communication, and how do you maintain connection even as you're meeting more and more exclusively with leaders, for example. But you still need to know what's happening on the ground and giving some voice to that and giving people those people ownership of it as well.

[00:39:33] **Tim Koller:** But it would require a significant level of maturity and emotional maturity as a leader to listen to the marginalized voices, the people on the fringe in your organization.

[00:39:44] **Angie Ward:** Yes. I mean again, it's slow, it's messy. We've been taught to believe that leadership should be fast and efficient. It's all about scaling, to get more done in less time. Bringing everyone's humanity into it and welcoming all that, look, that's messy, hard work. I had listened to a church turnaround guy a while ago, and he took on a massive turnaround situation, a church. If I said his name, a lot of you who are listening would probably have heard of it by now because it has turned out, but he did a workshop one time at a conference for their denomination called "Church Planting is for Wimps." Because he said, the work that I'm doing is a 5 to 10 to 15 year process, instead of just clearing the ground and going, well, I'm just going to start my own thing, and there's nothing wrong. I mean, we need more churches, but that patience to be in that for the long haul, when it gets frustrating, and we're tired, and it's exposing more things in us than we ever wanted to know about our dark side, or our flaws as leaders.

[00:40:59] **Tim Koller:** And it could be difficult as a leader to pastor the people you have, not the people you want to have. It requires an enormous amount of patience and trust in the Lord. And so, as we do this work, you know, if the listener to this is feeling a little overwhelmed, "I've never heard of adaptive leadership, and you just told me about the four things to look for in adaptive challenges, and here are the six things that a behavior of a leader must have." Is there hope for a leader who's feeling overwhelmed, even as they listen to us talk about adaptive leadership?

[00:41:28] **Angie Ward:** Yes, because ultimately our hope is in Christ, right? And so, he can do immeasurably more than what we can ask or imagine. But like you said early on in our conversation, I mean, you're not alone. First of all, this is the nature of leadership today. Having people that you can invite into your life to walk with you through this stuff, talk about this stuff. Our conversation summarized a lot of concepts. You know, we talked about a lot of different leadership concepts. Of course, we could always say, come to Denver Seminary and study under us and our program, but the book, *Uncharted Leadership*, summarizes some of the stuff so you can start to chew on it. This is stuff you have to chew on and absorb and digest. It's not just going to go put it out there. You have to internalize it and make it a part of us, and come out again, leading by who we are, not just what we do in mastery of skills or technical skills.

[00:42:29] **Tim Koller:** Yes. And the temptation in our culture is to grab our smart phone, look up, this book, order it, and get it to our house, and think the problem is solved. But it's actually not a quick fix.

[00:42:38] **Angie Ward:** You're just starting. Yeah.

[00:42:40] **Tim Koller:** That is going to be a lifelong project. And so, as long as the Lord gives us breath, my hope would be that, for our listeners and for you and I, that we would wake up animated, recognizing the Holy Spirit gave us breath today and a work to do. And so that work may in some seasons look like rest and recovery. And in other seasons, it may look like, go stretch, go learn, go do something. Grow, adapt. So, as we close out our conversation, I'm curious, are there any ideas you want to leave with our listeners?

[00:43:07] **Angie Ward:** I've said the, one of the big ones, that we lead out of who we are, not just what we do. There's a point where what we're doing is getting what we're getting, and we realize that the problem is, we have to grow. And grow in deeper ways and harder ways. To be an effective leader at that, and mature leader, and healthy leader, you have to do that work. So, you can put it off or you can just kind of embrace it. It's just part of that lifelong growth process. Like I said, that's probably the main thing.

[00:43:48] **Tim Koller:** It's so good. Well, Dr. Ward, I just want to say thank you for modeling the way. Thank you for showing us what an effective leader can look like in the midst of all the successes and all the failures. Thank you for the discipline it takes to create a resource like *Uncharted Leadership*. It's a beautiful thing to be able to see things that you have created be sent out into the world, challenge leaders and students to become more of who God has gifted them to be and blessed them to be and stewarded authority for them to be. And some students that are going through haven't yet stepped into that place of leadership, but it's preparing them so that when they get into those seasons, they go, I'm not alone. I'm not without hope. There are people who have articulated paths, and I can utilize the skill and I can utilize the community that God has called me into, the relationship I have with Christ, to actually go and animate change in the spaces that need to be changed. So, thank you for modeling the way, and thank you for joining me on the podcast.

[00:44:44] **Angie Ward:** Yeah, this was fun. I always love talking leadership with you. Thanks.

[00:44:48] **Tim Koller:** Well, my friends, thank you for joining us for this podcast, spending some time with us. If you get the chance, please leave us a rating or review wherever you listen to podcasts, and please send any questions or comments to us at podcast@denverseminary.edu. In addition, visit denverseminary.edu for more information and resources about Denver seminary, such as events, degree programs, and other episodes of Engage360, including full transcripts. We're grateful for your interest, support, and prayers. And until next time, may the Lord bless you.