



PROFESSIONAL CHRISTIAN COACHING TODAY

Chris McCluskey & Kim Avery

*The podcast dedicated to Raising the Standard of Coaching...
and Changing the World*

Episode 020

Coach-Training Literally Changed My Life:

Linda Slaton CPLC

CHRIS: We have a very fun episode today. One of our students from long ago who is doing some amazing things with Professional Grade Christian coaching is joining us here, Linda Slaton. Linda actually trained with us sometime back around the year 2001, 2002 something like that. She is a certified life coach through the program that I ran before we founded Professional Christian Coaching Institute. It was called Professional Christian Coaching Program. She fast tracked it and she's going to share with us some of the many ways in which that experience of training in a coach approach to life and her roles within life then have really touched every aspect of her life.

Let me tell you a little bit about Linda and then we'll just tee this up here. She is a mother of four. She's also a stepmother of two. She is a grandmother of eight. She lives in Little Rock, Arkansas with her hubby of 38 years, Dave. As you know, of course, she is a professional coach. She is also an author, a speaker and her books, let me just give you those titles in case you cared to check them out at some point. Her primary book is called Embracing Purpose. This is a Bible study that is specifically directed to women. It has a DVD series of her teachings. It

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comes with a leader guide. It's extremely popular. It has now been translated into Spanish, used in many different settings of women's ministry throughout the US and other countries. She has an accompanying book that also goes with Embracing Purpose that is called There's More. You can find quite a bit about Linda online if you care to. We'll give her information at the end of the broadcast. Kim, why don't you kick us into an interview here with Linda Slaton.

KIM: Thank you and we're so glad you could join us, Linda. I know this is the first time we've met so there's a lot I want to learn. In our email exchanges, there was one sentence that I'd love you to lead off with that was so intriguing. You said coaching literally changed your entire life. That's a powerful statement. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

LINDA: I would love to. I had no idea when I went through coach training all those years ago that it would impact really virtually every area of my life. I'm talking about my relationships, all of my relationships especially those that are closest to me but really all of my relationships. It changed my relationships. It changed how I did my job at church. I was on staff at church for many years. It has changed the way I interact with everybody I come across. It prompted me to write two books and that has grown and grown and grown. Now that's my fulltime day job. It has touched every area of my life. We can go into it however deeply you want to but it has changed the way I see people, and that changes the way I interact with people at a very fundamental level. That is what it has done for me.

KIM: I'm curious, if your husband, family member, or good friend were here and I said, "How is Linda different after coach training than she was before coach training?" What would they say?

LINDA: Well, if my daughter were here, she would say, "Well, she's much less judgmental now." My daughter, Carrie, say, yes, I ask more questions and I listen far better. That is, in a nutshell, what life coach training has done for me. It has taught me how to not master but work on the art of listening, which I think is a lost art and it

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has helped me develop the ability to ask good questions, probing questions, and much more beyond that. Those two simple concepts, they seem like that's not much but it makes all the difference in the world I've seen in relating to people.

CHRIS: Linda, you made a statement at the beginning of what you just shared there that the coach training and becoming a coach has changed fundamentally some of the ways that you view people and therefore the way in which you interact with them. So the questions and the powerful reflective kind of active listening, yeah, but say a little bit more about what you mean in terms of the way it has changed the way you look at people.

LINDA: Well, let me give you an illustration that sort of says it all. As a leader, a lay leader, and as personnel on staff in my church, the way I used to go about helping people was look one way and now it looks completely different. Here's the scenario from years ago – someone would come to me, see me in a leadership role in church. They would come to me for advice. They are going through some issue or some struggle, and they would share with me what was going on in their lives. Of course that made me feel very important and wise, and of course I thought I had much wisdom to share, just, you know, “Ask me anything.” They would ask for, in so many words, advice, and I would give that advice. If I gave good advice, they would go away feeling helped. They would feel better and they would come back for more. They would come back for more, and more.

Over time, I began to understand, “You know, I don't think this person is getting better. I don't think they are really getting any traction. Nothing is really changing. While they would go away and feel better for the moment, it wouldn't last. It wasn't sustainable, so to speak, and I would end up being worn out. I realized over time that I was becoming a crutch and I was really not helping these people. Fast forward, go through life coach training and this is an actual situation that happened. I've been coaching this young lady for a little while and she had an amazing insight. We were sort of celebrating the moment and saying, “Wow, that's so great. You had this insight.” Just a big light bulb went off in her head

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and she turned to me and said, “Linda, thank you so much.” I said, “Hold on. I didn’t have that insight. You did.” She immediately was taken aback and sort of sat up a little bit straighter and said, “Oh, I did, didn’t I?” I said, “Yes, you had that insight not me.” And then she thought for a minute. I said, “All I did was ask a few questions and maybe offer some support.” She said, “Well, thank you for that.” I said, “You’re welcome but I can’t take credit for the insight, the breakthrough.” That’s a real good picture of how everything started to change.

The principle beneath that is the principle that I learned in life coach training and that is you, the client, is an expert on your own life not me and I thought erroneously at some level I was the expert on someone’s life when they’ve shared with me 10 minutes about this issue. That’s such an arrogant, foolish way to think and now I realize what you taught, Chris, was so true, you are always the expert in your own life. That helped me to learn how to believe in people and how not to judge people, how to understand it. They can come to their own insights with good encouragement and support, and some well thought out questions.

CHRIS: Boy, you just really nailed with that example something we emphasize so much in the training which is that the idea that your role as a coach is to work from the inside out of that client. You’re seeking to reach in and pull out what’s in there. You don’t know and they don’t know it or have access to it. Nearly like they do when it comes tumbling out of their own mouth, they hear it tumble out of their mouth. They are thinking they should thank you for it. You said, “That came from you. That didn’t come from me,” but the coach was there to pull it out so that inside out, that teasing forth or wooing out or calling forth what’s in there, that’s the role of the coach, radically different from the very well intentioned but misdirected outside in model that we normally follow.

I’m here to help and truly wanting to help, not meaning to be arrogant but wanting to provide from what life experience I do have. Let me from the outside pour into you. I’ll fill your cup up and as you emphasized, not only was it not often

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proving terribly helpful or sustainably helpful to the person. You were sensing you were becoming a crutch to them, but it was also draining. When we're working from the outside in, it drains us. Coaching doesn't leave that same sense of being drained.

LINDA: And you don't ever have to be the expert. You don't have to have the answers. The pressure is off the coach. You can relax. If I did come up with solution for you and your life, the next step would be to convince you to accept my solution to your problem and that's a whole another set of challenges. The pressure is off the coach and it's not easy. It's hard for someone like me who likes to talk to actually be quiet, listen, and let my curiosity take over and lead me to good questions. Chris, I just have to tell this. I don't know if you remember this or not, but when I was in coach training with you, we were on the phone, we were having a class and I asked the question, "So what do you do, Chris, if you really tend to just talk a lot? I mean, what do you do?" Chris was very profound and said, "Bite your tongue." I said, "Yeah, but what do you do?" "Bite your tongue, Linda." "Yeah, but..." "Bite your tongue. Put your tongue between your teeth and pair it down until it hurts, Linda." I have never forgotten that, Chris. Thank you. I have passed that along to countless women, so thank you.

CHRIS: That's a pretty funny story and Kim, I know you're chopping at the bit to ask a question here so I'm going to pass it to you but I got a riff off of that there. The reason I could say that so authoritatively doesn't have anything to do with me being somebody who likes to have the answers. Of course you realize that.

LINDA: Right.

CHRIS: I think it illustrates the difficulty that so much of what we learn in becoming a really proficient coach is what we're unlearning - unlearning our normal role, our normal way of interacting, our normal way of "helping." It often doesn't help. It gets in the way. Very well intentioned, very misdirected, that is tough to unlearn. So yeah, bite our tongues pretty frequently.

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LINDA: Very tough and here's what I learned. I learned that I was indeed important in that relationship I was trying to have with people when I was helping them. I was an important roadblock to what God was trying to do in their life. I was important to the negative and that is not exactly my goal. I have had to unlearn a lifetime prior to coach training and I'm thankful for the experience. I can't tell you how thankful I am for it.

KIM: I would have to agree. It has had the same effect in my life. Because you're such a big believer, it sounds like coaching permeated not just your personal life but your ministry life at church and some of the professional things you're doing. Talk about how you made that switch and the different impact that had.

LINDA: Well it actually happened this way for me. I went through life coach training, well, I went through a crisis in my own life maybe kind of a crisis of faith where I was suffering from what I call failure to thrive. Here, I was a believer of over 20 years and loved Jesus. I was very active in my church, had a true relationship with the Lord, but something was missing and I lack satisfaction in my life. I was in a struggle of failure to thrive for like three years. When I finally figured out what was wrong with me and that is I lacked purpose, even though I knew Jesus, even though I loved His word, I lacked purpose. I didn't know how to direct my time. I didn't know what to put on my calendar today, tomorrow, and next month. I didn't know what to say yes or no to.

When I found my purpose, all those questions were answered and when I found my purpose, then I went through life coach training and all along the way, it was as if God was whispering to me, "You need to write a study to help other women figure this out." There was born Embracing Purpose. It was because of Embracing Purpose and because of my credentials of a certified life coach that was I hired at Fellowship Bible Church to be on staff and to serve in the Missions Department. Oh my goodness, I have used life coach training so much in that role at church. My bottom line role at church was to help people in the body get engaged in works of service in the community either locally or globally, not so

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much in the church walls but missionally. It was a perfect fit for me and I use life coaching training all the time in that role.

KIM: It's so very exciting, Linda. Even as you're telling that story, there are so many coaches I know who would love to have their church embrace coaching and embrace the importance of purpose. If you could just kind of zoom in just a little bit and talk about how did you help your church get buy in to that vision?

LINDA: A lot of talking, a lot of it was very organic. A lot of it with my own direct boss, my overseer on staff, as I began to share with him just basic principles in how I approach people and how I do things, he began to see the great value. He began to see fruit come from those interactions with people and of course any church that's missional and wants their people involved in the community whether locally or globally, all those churches have that big question, that big challenge is how do I get my people, the people of this body out of their seats and into the streets, so to speak, to serve the kingdom and with kingdom purpose. As they began to see how coaching principles help that, I gained more and more credibility, the coach approach gained more credibility in the church.

KIM: Okay. So I hear it wasn't one big whiz bang presentation that you made at one time but just slowly letting people know what you're doing, letting them see the fruit of what you're doing, sharing, building relationships.

LINDA: Yes and then also, Kim, with my own small group leaders, I began to train them in what I call the coach approach to small group facilitation. As those facilitators gained skill and confidence as a small group leader, word kind of spread and then other leaders wanted the same thing. That began to kind of take root organically and other people wanted the same thing.

CHRIS: Linda, Fellowship Bible Church, there are a lot of listeners who surely are not familiar with it. It's in Little Rock, Arkansas. People have all different kind of conceptions of the average church in the US is a 200 people or so. Fellowship is a pretty forward thinking progressive church. Kind of paint the picture for us of

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where Fellowship was, the state it was when you began having these organic conversations about how coaching could impact the ministry and they started to kind of letting some doors open for you and what has grown now from those early days to an explosive ministry now.

LINDA: It is. Fellowship is doing a lot of great work and one of the main reasons why I love my church so much is because what we do initially, we are so involved in the community, we are so involved with the Department of Corrections, with local colleges here. We have so many different partnerships locally as well as globally, but it's what we do locally. A lot of churches think missions or view missions as just what you do across the big blue pond, but other churches today are more and more focused on what we can do globally that we can be involved in through the regular rhythms of our lives, not just one time a year or one time every five years to go on a missions trip.

Fellowship has just done amazing things in the Central Arkansas community and to do those amazing things, we need the Body of Christ engaged. Often times, men and women 1) they don't think they have anything to offer the Kingdom, they don't think they have any gifts or talents, 2) they lack the confidence to get out there and pursue and engage. They need a little bit of help along the way and coaching really provides that help. It's a little bit of a hand holding on the front end giving support and encouragement to get them to take that step and explore ministries. I've incorporated that into a lot of what I've done.

KIM: It sounds like you don't take directly necessarily though I'm sure you could, you're embracing purpose curriculum and some of the things you're doing right to the community, you are taking it to the people in your church, training them up, helping them get a comfort level and a vision of their own purpose and then these equipped team leaders go out into the community and I think you mentioned, did you say prisons?

LINDA: Yes.

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KIM: That's a fascinating application. What is that?

LINDA: It has been amazing and Chris, before we actually got on air, you mentioned Men's Fraternity. Men's Fraternity, A Quest for Authentic Manhood is an international ministry to men and they have been very involved in prison ministry internationally as well. Because of Men's Fraternity on the inside, they call it in prisons, doors were opened. They wanted something for women and so I was invited to come in and talk to some of the heads of the Department of Corrections and talk about embracing purpose. It was wonderful. I remember the first conversation I had, I asked, "What do you want for your women on the inside?" One of the answers was, "I want our women to know they are not losers." It was that answer that helped me know that Embracing Purpose might be a good fit.

CHRIS: Wow, beautiful. Let me recap if I can where all of these organically grew? As you caught the vision for what life coach training was doing in your own person, in your own self, and the way you were interacting with people, and you began looking kind of private practice model, you also started having conversations with persons on staff at your church, Fellowship Bible Church. It's a progressive forward thinking, very community missionally oriented church and they began saying, "Oh, what about you talking to so and so and so?" Through those conversations, other doors began to open and you just started exploring about possible places that coaching could apply. You equipped people in the church and then they became, are they like co-facilitators? Are they trained under your material? This is now much larger than just Linda Slaton, right?

LINDA: They are trained under my material to do whatever they want do to. It doesn't have to be Embracing Purpose or my material, but to take those concepts and apply them to any small group they are leading or any ministry they are leading. As you know Chris and Kim, the coaching relationship is done formally and very informally in the way that you just talk to people in your world. You have great influence when you're able to use those basic coaching skills, listening and asking

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powerful questions and supporting. You're able to have such a great influence wherever you go and whatever you do.

KIM: Can I ask how do you train these leaders? What does your training model look like for, say, people who do just want to have lay applications in their ordinary daily lives? They just want to use a more coach approach. How do you help them do that?

LINDA: Well, that's a good question. Just this past weekend, I spoke at a church in another city here in Arkansas, Hot Springs, and we titled it the Coach Approach to Authentic Relationships. Usually when I do these training, I speak directly to small group leaders and that's my audience, but they wanted to broaden it and make it available for all the women in the church, so we changed the title to Coach Approach to Authentic Relationships. What I focus on are the art of listening, the art of asking, and the art of believing in people. Looking at people and relating to people the way that God relates to us. In a nutshell, looking at people in terms of their potential as opposed to their problems and so it's those three concepts that I develop. So three-hour morning the other day, we had lunch, we had small group, and two parts of a talk.

CHRIS: Linda, let's bring this into specific focus. Right now today, from your original thoughts, dreams, and desires for Embracing Purpose to fast forwarding to where we are now today, where are all the different fingers and places that God has you administering through Embracing Purpose?

LINDA: Well, it's amazing to me really that by word of mouth marketing only, Embracing Purpose has spread to 38 different states and in some of those states, many different cities in those states and what's really exciting for me is that often times when a church grabs hold of Embracing Purpose, they offer it not just once but year after year as a part of their regular curriculum. It's also in prisons, several prisons in Arkansas and hopefully, we'll be in several prisons in Texas very soon

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now. I hope for the future is that we will also be in Christian colleges. I've had so many mothers of young women say, "My daughter needs this. She needs it now while she's in college or just having graduated from college." That's a new area that we're looking at. Beyond that, I'm starting to train facilitators more and more and I would love to be invited to churches all over this country and train small group facilitators. In addition, an earlier version of Embracing Purpose was translated into Spanish and is now in three Central American Countries – Honduras, South Salvador, and Guatemala. We have an awful lot of Spanish speaking people in this country now so I'm hoping that will spread as well.

KIM: That is great stuff and it's neat to see God from the seed of coach training back in 2001, 2002 what has just come to full fruit and will continue, Lord willing, to feed and bless the church and other people. Any final thoughts you want to leave our listeners today, Linda?

LINDA: As I look back over the time since I took life coach training and became certified, I realized I actually love people better now than I did before. That's pretty important to God. It is the great command and all that to say, life coach training has made a tremendous impact on my life and hopefully on the lives of those around me.

CHRIS: Wonderful. If you want to find Linda out on the web, you will find her at EmbracingPurpose.org. All of her curriculum, training materials are there, contact information. Gang, until next time, keep raising the standard in changing the world.

KIM: God's richest blessings to you.

LINDA: Thank you, bye.

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