



PROFESSIONAL CHRISTIAN COACHING TODAY

Chris McCluskey & Kim Avery

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

Episode 011

Coaching High Capacity Leaders with Greg Leith, CEO of Convene

KIM: Welcome and it is a privilege to have as our guest today on the podcast Greg Leith. Greg is the CEO of marketplace ministry to Christian business owners and executives called Convene. Greg comes from a rich background. His career is in Fortune 500 enterprises, franchise operations, nonprofits associations and academics, yet on the other side, he has really served the church over the years in India, China, Nepal, Haiti with relief and other Christian efforts, and better than all of that on a personal note, I know he is excited to say that he has been married 35 years to the same woman. He and his wife, Shelley, get to travel Canada from end and to end speaking about marriage and family life and their five amazing children. With all of that, Chris, it is such a joy to have Greg with us today.

CHRIS: Well it is and it gets even better than that. Greg and I first connected with each other about 10 years ago when he was heading up the executive leadership program which was a pilot project of Christian Management Association. Many of our listeners will be familiar with Christian management association, been serving Christian

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parachurch ministry leaders for probably 30 some odd years now or so. There was special funding for a program that they launched called the Executive Leadership Program in which for a year, persons that run these large parachurch ministries, the ones that were household names that we would all recognize if we heard them, they would send their executive leaders to a yearlong program of intense analysis of their own leadership capacity and how to increase their capacity for dynamic leadership in this really rapidly changing world that we find ourselves.

Greg was brought in to head that thing up and he tapped me to come in and service the coaching component for that yearlong program. Now we didn't go off to an island for a year and just kind of contemplated our [inaudible 02:32]. It was a three different weeks during that year that these executives, Greg and the rest of the leadership team would get off somewhere at a retreat facility. We would all fly in and spend an intensive week going over all kinds of coaching exercises, personal inventories, 360 analyses, those kinds of things, and again, the experience was just such an intense experience of coaching applied to individual leaders in positions of high responsibility who are seeking to really up their game, to take things to the next level. So that's where the friendship built. Greg is going to fill us in with the next chapter because I've got a very interesting phone call from him just about six, eight months ago when he had assumed this new position as Chief Executive Officer for Convene. Greg, I'm going to pass it to you. Welcome to the podcast and kind of fill us in on you stepping into this new capacity in Convene.

GREG: Thanks, Chris. It's great to be with you and Kim, it's great to be with you. I wanted to say that as you were saying that, it's kind of the same thing that was happening. I remember it now what is Christian Leadership Alliance, CLA, that we had to "coach" these executives and nobody really knew what coaching meant. I think that was back in the day, 1995 or so, when coaching meant kind of pat you on the back and say, "Way to go." I had executives who tried to be executives instead of coaching. I had psychologists trying to put people on the coach and consultants who wanted another business deal. the same kind of thing happened 20 years later now at Convene where

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our chairs needed to move to a place of understanding coaching as a real life dynamic, certified, bona fide designation that today in the 2000s, it's not something that we can just say, "I'm a coach," but really, the industry has moved forward in a significant way as you all know, and it has said there's a certification to this thing. So not only was my first call that Christian Leadership Alliance to you but my first call at Convene was to you. I think I was standing in my backyard saying, "Is there any way you can come and help us understand what coaching is as we are working with CEOs and executives?" You said yes and we had a great time having you speak to hundreds of executives here in California.

CHRIS: Yeah, it has been a whirlwind year. That put a lot of different things in motion which we may talk about here in this episode. We'll see. Greg, you're going to need to get our listeners on page with understanding what is Convene. For many, this is the first time they have heard of that organization. It is a powerful marketplace ministry, but paint us into the picture. What have you assumed the leadership of here in serving as CEO for Convene? What is it?

GREG: Well, let me start with a premise. I think learning, real learning happens life on life over time. So we looked at the peer to peer environment, things like vestige on the secular side and we said, "What would it be if we took the life on life, peer to peer mentoring of CEOs in a group of people and we lay that all in a Biblical platform? So we now have business excellence married to Biblical value set and one day per month Christian CEOs get together with each other led by a moderator which we call a chair, and they help each other to face the questions of life such as loneliness or whatever the case may be. They work together to help each other to combat the things that go awry or that need more than one head in the C suite. That's Convene in a nutshell.

CHRIS: Beautiful. It's a bit like a mastermind. If people are trying to plug it into something they may be familiar with, this is high capacity leaders who are being brought together voluntarily. They are actually paying to say, "I want to be part of these

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Convene groups that your chairs are facilitating” and as part of a small group, 10, 12, 15 persons per group, is that right?

GREG: That’s right and so I think a distinction that’s important is that this is not a Bible study. So a lot of people think, “Oh, that’s another Christian Bible study of executives where you read a chapter in a book while you have a donut and a coffee in the morning at 6:30 before you run to work.” It’s not that at all. It’s 8AM until 4PM, 10, 12, 14, 16 men and women meeting together, paying to be in the group to talk about how they can help each other solve business problems on a Biblical platform.

KIM: So Greg if I were in an invisible participant in the room or observer in the room, what would I see during a typical day like this?

GREG: That is a great question. We would start out with a Devotional that was a Biblical content geared towards the marketplace so we might talk about a marketing issue, an operations issue and we relate that back to God. For example, 52 parables that Jesus did, 45 had workplace context. So it’s not too hard to find workplace context when over 85% of Jesus’ parables were about the marketplace. So much of what He did was about the marketplace. So we would do a Devotional then we would have some content learning where we would say, “What is great marketing look like? What is great operations look like?” What is important about understanding your profit loss statement?” We would put that all in a Biblical platform, put that all in a Biblical framework. In the afternoon, people would bring business issues. It might be, “I want to move into China.” It might be, “I feel out of balanced in my marriage.” It might be, “I have a profit problem.” It might be, “I have a growth issue,” and there would be the power of the mastermind group that would solve the problem jointly and be kind and not rude and not say, “Hey, I can’t believe you would do that,” but it would be more, “What is God’s word have to say about this issue and by the way, why aren’t you monitoring your sales people?” or whatever the case may be.

KIM: Okay and it sounds like you felt that coaching was going to make a substantial difference in the outcomes from this daylong get togethers.

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GREG: Yeah. One of the people who is just helping us along the way who had a big role in the early days of vestige likes to say, “A vestige is the secular peer to peer advisor group,” likes to say, “The chair, the person who leads the group, is the king of the process not the king of the content. If the chair is going to be a facilitator of 10, 12, 16 people, they need to understand how to be a great coach, not just somebody who says, “Let me tell you three things you need to do.” That doesn’t work anymore. Those days are over.

CHRIS: Very definitely and that was one of the things that got me very stoked about the phone call that you made to me and saying, “Okay, I am now a steward of this vision that has been handed on to me. I think Convene has been around in various iterations for about 25 years or so, but you were saying that the place that I see things need to go has to incorporate in what I’ve seen in coaching from back in that executive leadership program where I see our chairs not necessarily dumping any of the services they have provided before but I need to see them expanding, adding to their toolkit this thing that you see as distinctly Christian professional grade coaching.

GREG: Yeah, so any of our chairs are independent business people and I think an important part of being an independent business leader today in the executive space is clearly that you need to do something about being a business type coach. Part of the Convene offering is that any member of the Convene groups gets 90 minutes a month of coaching. We call them a one to one and I just don’t want our very great chairs to go to those meetings and not be as professionally equipped as they can possibly be to bring out the best in the person that they are coaching the member of the Convene group.

KIM: What has been some of the response of the members to the more coach approach that you are taking?

GREG: Well I tell you, we had somebody who was in the training sessions that we’re doing just in the midst of training our chairs say that this is revolutionary and these are people who are great consultants, who run incredible groups, who have been around

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business for a long time, but we're all so used to saying things like, "Let me tell you the two things you need to do before we meet next week" and it's very revolutionary for a business leader to stop prescribing and work from the inside out instead of the outside in.

CHRIS: That excites me because of course as we've emphasized on these podcasts, Kim, that is so much at the heart of what coaching is about. It doesn't seek to replace other ways of helping people. It does bring something that we say is revolutionary. It's quite different when instead of prescribing as Greg says from the outside in. "Here's my advice. You've hired me as a consultant. Here's my counsel to you. You've hired me as your therapist or your mentor. Here's what I think you should do. I'm your pastor. I want you to study these kinds of things and I need you to read this book and we're going to do a study on such and such." Those are all wonderful ways of helping people grow and they all are centered from a space outside of the client themselves. It's an outside in advisory or directive, guiding or teaching kind of a model. Coaching flips that on its head and says, "There's a tremendous amount inside of that client already that the client probably doesn't have nearly full access to yet." Kim, you and I have talked on these podcasts about how we even we ourselves use a coach. Though we are coaches, we train coaches, we just find that the ability to access everything that is actually inside of self or everything that God may be stirring up inside of self is impaired somehow when it's just us with us, but when a coach comes in and seeks not to advise but instead to draw, to call forth, to woo out from our own mouths to our own ears more of what's in there, we suddenly get these revelatory "aha" moments about what we need to do or where we should go next or who God is calling us to be, how we need to step up our game. Greg, talk to this, what is the buy in, the likelihood of follow through on an insight that one of your Convene members get when they hear it tumble out of their own mouth versus someone just kind of handing it to them as a best practice, a recommended step to take.

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GREG: Yeah. Well, I think you're the one with the corner and the knowledge on that, but the numbers are so much higher when someone comes up with an idea on their own. Nobody really likes to be told what to do, but I think the business world is full of people telling people what to do because that's what we do. We have John reporting to Mary and Mary tells John what to do. That's just is how life is in the business world. I think millennials certainly are coming in the picture saying, "Please don't tell me what to do," but that's maybe a place that is not the entire workspace of America but it is an interesting group who is beginning to say, "Hey, I don't really like it when you tell me what to do," but the truth is if you're 55 years old, you don't really like to be told what to do, so I think coaching is this place of saying, "What would it be like if and how can I help you think about..." and all those kinds of great questions that are inside out questions. I think the truth is that business leaders think that's weak. Business leaders think that is kind of this mamby pamby Casper milk toast thing that really doesn't work. It's all sort of psycho babble and it's just not true. I think Jesus was pretty great at asking questions and I think we need to model our C suite leadership after the work that He did.

KIM: Absolutely. So how do you get their buy in at the front end while they are still used to being told or telling other people what to do?

GREG: Well precisely that's why we have something over 20, which I think over half of our chairs in the training from PCCI because I thought the best way to get that to happen was to get Chris and his team on the phone with our chairs on a regular basis. He created a custom class and this is something where we're teaching these chairs how to do this. For me how to is to hire PCCI and say, "Show our team how to do that."

CHRIS: Greg is using our acronym there, PCCI, Professional Christian Coaching Institute. Of course the institute that supports this podcast here, but yeah he did. After that phone call, Kim, in the beginning of, oh golly what was it, six, eight months ago when he assumed the position there of CEO, initially, it was just, "I think this is the direction that we need to be going. Can we bring you in to keynote at our summit?" They had a conference coming up in just about two and a half months or so. I was thrilled to do

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that. You know that from our faculty, our Dean of Faculty, Cheryl Scanlan, came with me and the two of us did a preconference workshop for a day. We had the privilege of training most of their chairs for an entire day in just real basic kind of a flyover of the basics of effective coaching integrated into the work that they are doing. There were so much enthusiasm before Cheryl and I even wrapped up that day, there was the formal request, “Okay, we need more training in this.” So we went from initially thinking we would just fold these chairs into the training that we do at PCCI to instead saying, “You know what, we’ll create a tailor made offering of our services for these chairs.” So that’s kind of where things are now. We are most of the way through that what we’re calling kind of a beta launch of a specialized leadership coach training program. It’s actually an independent school now inside of the institute just training again high capacity leaders to work with other high capacity leaders in a coach approach to the work that they are doing to draw out the best in their people.

GREG: Yeah and I think it’s important to note there. Chris, that again, this sounds like cookies on the bottom shelf but the most important thing, the most important work that we’re doing is reorienting people’s minds that our chairs, which would be the people you trained to be coaches to say, “You don’t have to have all these knowledge that you just overlay on people’s lives. The most important thing that you want to do as a coach and for me as a chair for my chairs in Convene is we want them to pull out of other people that’s already mostly inside of them and to guide, to lead, to prod, and to just work with the person instead of saying, “Oh my gosh. That is a perfect time for me to tell you about Chapter 4 of a book I just read yesterday that you should read. As a matter of fact, why don’t you read Chapter 4 and we’ll talk about it next week.” No.

KIM: Yeah, very powerful and I know that you in the business sector are excited about coaching not just for coaching’s sake like perhaps Chris and I are, but because of the ripple effects that it has and your real passion is for this marketplace ministry and the kinds of things that can happen there. So can you talk a little bit about that?

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GREG: Sure. Let's just think of this morning for a second. If people are listening to this and it's not a Sunday or a Saturday, it's Monday to Friday, 7 billion people went to work as I said earlier and most of them didn't go to church this week. The problem is according to some of the greatest thinkers of our time, guys like David Ulrich who wrote the book, *The Why of Work*, 70% of people at work are disengaged. So Jesus spent all His time in the marketplace, a significant amount of time in the marketplace yet today's marketplace, 70% of people workers are disengaged. I think that means we need to reframe culture. I think that means we need to reunderstand that our business can be a vehicle for used by God and if we can awaken through great coaching the latent energy in the marketplace, I think we can reframe culture. I think we can have that raise the cross at the center of the marketplace type voice and again in the Monday to Friday when in just United States alone, what would you want to say, 400, 500 million people are at work, we don't need to say, "Hey, why don't you come to church?" Why don't we say, "Hey, why don't we have a talk about meaning and purpose, love and all of those things that Jesus was so good about talking about?" Because I think if we do that right and we sort of create human flourishing in the market place that customers and vendors and employees can have the curtains pulled back on the meaning and purpose of life, and if we do that right, entire communities, entire counties, countries will have a move towards God's ordained purposes for the world, and it's not just going the happen in church. The church is a great place. It should happen in church but it needs to also happen to Monday to Friday. We need to redeem the marketplace and I think if great coaches can ask great questions, we will pull out the latent energy begin to reflect this God who loves people to a culture that is going off the tracks.

CHRIS: Greg, your passion comes through so strongly when you're talking about that and that's one of the things that Cheryl and I both commented on frequently on our trip back from the Convene summit. In thinking about the energy in the room that was reacting to, responding to the presentations, the keynote talks that you had, I'm thinking of the talk that Steve Green, present CEO of Hobby Lobby, standing up there and talking about, as you said raising the cross in the marketplace. All of our

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listeners are familiar with what Hobby Lobby has taken a hammering for and they didn't just kind of somehow survived or scraping by, they are having huge cultural influence because of their Christian witness in the way that they run things according to business principles. They've gone head to head even against the administration in pushing back on things that we're pushing too far into what Christians need to have the freedom to be able to do in the marketplace. Cheryl Bachelder same way, another one of the keynotes that you brought in for that presentation there, CEO of Popeyes Louisiana Kitchens, used to be Popeyes Chicken, and just turned that baby around on the stock exchange. It had lost so much value. Franchise owners were so unhappy and Cheryl, rock solid Christian, beautiful witness for the Lord, I remember her saying in her talk that day there that somebody questioned her, Well, how do you bring Christ into the market place? I mean, you can't talk about Christian things in your position as CEO of a secular company." She said, "Oh my goodness. I quote Scripture all the time. I just don't give chapter and verse."

GREG: Right.

CHRIS: She said our presence, our witness there as Christians first and foremost in positions of great influence impact and not just the bottom line of that company, not just the private lives even of the employees of that company, they impact our culture and therefore our world. When we confidently, comfortably, beautifully bring in Christ to every aspect of what we do Monday through Friday not just on Saturday or Sunday services.

GREG: Right, right, and see where does that come from? That comes from a Biblical value set that says. "If people are created in the image of God, people have value; therefore, if people have value, we should treat them with dignity and worth." If we understand that we live in a post Genesis 3 world and people are broken, then when somebody does something wrong, we don't look at them with those two principles in mind and say, "Oh my gosh. What an idiot. I could have done that better." We look at them and say, "They are a valuable person. I need to treat them with dignity. If I messed up, I would want to be treated with dignity and as a matter of fact, I just messed up

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yesterday so I better be kind to this person.” When we can draw that kind of thinking out through great coaching and really turn a CEO to a place of understanding their business as a vehicle for use by God in the lives of people in the market place, then we can reframe culture.

CHRIS: Yeah. The more that I caught the big vision that is Convene and that you have now in being called to steward well, this ministry that God has entrusted to you, the more excited I got about the potential impact here because as I just referenced a moment ago, we’re talking now not just about having a very positive influence on the bottom line of various companies that are owned or run by Christians. We’re talking about influencing the culture within that company, the individual lives of the employees who don’t even want to think about going to work anyone else because they have never had an employer who treats them as such a full human being with a real life outside of the office and they are worth something more than just being a “human resource.” I talked about that in my keynote talk there at the conference that we really need to rethink that department in most companies of Human Resources. Humans are not resources. We are in the process of personnel development. I like talking about the company, that department being more about personnel development, long term commitment to developing the whole person and what are their roles, where do they fit best in the company. As the company is emerging, do they catch the vision of where else they could fit? How can we help retool them? How can we invest in these people long term but man, Greg, the cultural impact and therefore the legacy that those kinds of Christian owned businesses could have in the marketplace. There’s no way to conceive that but that really is the bigger vision of what Convene is about, right?

GREG: Yeah, that’s exactly right. We want to redeem and sort of retake that Monday to Friday marketplace over for the Kingdom of God. Let there be no mistake. This is not sort of a Bible thumping, forget about profit kind of thing where we just run around the marketplace and talk about God. It’s not that at all because if we don’t have profit and we don’t treat people well, we don’t do excellent things with excellent

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products, we don't have a company to honor God. So we have to have these great end goals of yes, honor God, advance the Kingdom, but the means to the end is profit, people, and excellence. If we get profit, people, and excellence right, then I think we can have the vehicle called a profitable, healthy company to honor God.

KIM: Well and it proves out those Biblical principles that when you align your life and your business in accordance with the way God said to do it, you will be profitable. You will love people well and that will make a difference and be excellence.

GREG: That's right.

KIM: I know that beyond just the business aspect that you have what you call parallel priorities in Convene. It's not just about the business for the chairs and the people who are participating and their people. There are other priorities you have and want to help them address. Can you mention some of those?

GREG: Sure. There is a translation of the Bible called The Message that I think everybody is familiar with that essentially in one verse says if all I have left that I'm holding was a fistful of air then that's not a good thing. I think that if all we have left holding is a profitable company that honors God with my 100 or 1000 employees, we have a couple of Convene CEOs that manage billion dollar companies. So if all I did is get my billion dollar company to grow 10%, and that world billion, 100 million, but I lost my family in the process, that's not a good place to be. The parallel priorities for us say we want there to be attention and focus, importance, and value placed on family. I had a chance to watch war room on the weekend. I know I'm a little late on that but here's this guy who is cheating at this company, loses his job, and doesn't have a hot clue what's going on with his daughter or his wife. Through the process of getting fired, not the CEO but he lost his job and reemphasized family. Well, we think at Convene that family and who you are as a person is really important because if you don't know who you are and you're not healthy, you're not balanced, and you don't have a good family situation if you're married then man, you're just going to go to work and wreak havoc.

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KIM: Absolutely. So it's that fully integrated person, again it's that inside out approach that they are not just helping other people with but you're encouraging each participant to have in their own life before they go out and make this culture in their company.

GREG: Absolutely, Kim.

CHRIS: Well, this is everything that I had hoped this interview would be and more. Besides, I do think we really captured the spirit of what Convene is about and Kim, what a beautiful example of the integration of what you and I believe so strongly that coaching can bring to any setting. To hear on such a macro scale of how one visionary CEO is bringing coaching into the center of what Convene is all about and then to begin to try to put our little brains around what the ripple effects of that can be in the market places, in all the far flung countries where these businesses have influence, many of them much more influence in some ways than the church may have in those settings, but if the church really is in the marketplace, people have to feed their families, and what a great opportunity that is often times a missed opportunity to bring the light of Christ, the love of Christ, and the spiritual truths that we know change culture and meet people where they actually have their greatest felt needs.

GREG: Exactly. There's a poem actually. I'm not much of a poet, I'm a business guy but there's a poem that struck me about 10 years ago written by a Scottish clergyman. His name is George McCloud and he said in this poem, "I simply argue that the cross be raised again at the center of the marketplace. Jesus was not crucified on a cross between two candles but on a cross between two thieves on a town garbage heap where cynics talk smut and soldiers gamble, and that's where churchmen ought to be and that's where churchmen ought to be about. About the only thing we need to revise about [inaudible 31:06] church men and women ought to be about because if we raise the cross again at the center of the marketplace then I think we can redeem the culture.

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KIM: It's a beautiful vision.

CHRIS: Amen to that. Well listeners, I would imagine many of you now are more than curious about Convene. Let me tell you where you can find out more about them and connect with Greg and his team there. You'll find them on the web at ConveneNow.com. If you're out on YouTube, you can also download a very powerful video that explains a lot of the heart of what Convene is about and gives some very nice visual demonstration of that. If you go to YouTube and do a search for It's Time to Convene, you'll be able to pull up that video. Of course when you're on their website at ConveneNow.com, be sure to access, they have several leadership articles there and other valuable resources. It's easy breezy to connect with their entity if you are a Christian business owner or a CEO of a large company and you are looking at being able to find out more and maybe join a Convene group or you're interested in sharing in such a group, all of that is available there.

GREG: I guess, Chris, we haven't said that there are about 40 Convene groups all the way from Boston to San Francisco and everything in between. If somebody is interested in joining Convene Group, they will find it on the web and secondly, there could be somebody who is listening who has got a great coaching business but they'd say, "Hmm, I would like to work with executives." Just give a call at Convene. Just go to the website, Convene Now, and we'd be happy to talk to them about augmenting their business by becoming a Convene chair.

KIM: Terrific. Thank you so much for your time today, Greg, and for our listeners, also just a quick reminder that if you're interested in these topics, we have the free Align Your Life Inventory at ProfessionalChristianCoachingToday.com. If you enjoyed our podcast, we really would appreciate it if you would leave a comment and rating on iTunes and spread the word to pastors, other ministry business leaders through your social media.

CHRIS: Greg, thanks so much for joining us. God's continued blessings on your good work.

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GREG: Thanks you guys, Kim and Chris. Thank you so much and I would just return that thought to you and that prayer which would be that God would just continue to raise up Christian coaches through the work that you do at PCCI. It's so important to get people to engage with others in a meaningful way because we can redeem the culture from the living room as well as from the C suite, so thanks.

CHRIS: Amen to that. Well gang, until next time. Keep raising the standard of coaching and changing the world.

KIM: God's richest blessings to you.