



# PROFESSIONAL CHRISTIAN COACHING TODAY

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

## Episode 013

### Creating Successful Change

CHRIS: We are going to look at coaching today in terms specifically of aiding the change process and what we're going to be focusing on is a model for looking at how coaching can aid this very difficult process of changing.

KIM: It's such an important topic as you mentioned and I don't know about you, Chris, or people who are listening how many of you have firmly set a New Year's Resolution January 1<sup>st</sup>. You were determined and excited, and this was the year it was going to happen. It does for about two weeks until something happens. We get distracted. Our attention gets pulled. It just gets too hard and coaching has so many things it can bring to this topic, but we're going to talk about one of them specifically today. This is a model developed by organizational psychologist, William Howell. He calls it The Four Phases of Learning. I think an awareness and understanding of these phases of learning can really aid and abet us in this process of creating successful change.

CHRIS: Well, let's hope so. At first blush, this may not sound like exactly rocket science. It's a pretty simple four phase model, the four phases of learning here, but hopefully as we add some meat to the bones of it, you'll recognize, "Okay, yeah I can see

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where in my life right now I have various aspects that fall into each of these four categories.” The first of these phases of learning is what Howell calls Unconscious Incompetence. Not any big fancy words, we’re going to think about it for a moment there – unconscious incompetence. In other words, we’re not good at whatever the thing is that needs to change but we’re not even aware of it really. It’s just there is this simple fact that you don’t know what you don’t know. You don’t realize it until something in life, somebody, some new challenge, some new opportunity before you makes you suddenly aware. “Oooh wow, I want to move toward that and oh my goodness, I didn’t realize I don’t bring to the table some of what I’m already going to need for that.”

To give a really quick simple example of that, more than a year ago about this time actually, Rachel, my wife, and my seven children and I jumped a plane in St. Louis and flew over to the other side of the pond, as they say. We took a wonderful lengthy vacation throughout various parts of Europe. The first place we landed was in Dublin, Ireland. McCluskey, that’s a good Irish name so we figured we start in our homeland, but in Ireland of course as throughout Scotland and England, they drive on what we would call the wrong side of the road. Not only do they drive on the opposite side of the road that we’re used to here in the States but actually the steering wheel and everything is actually on the other side of the car.

So I got off the plane and I guess I had known. Okay, so when we rent this vehicle over there, I’m going to be driving on the wrong side of the road. I hadn’t thought about shifting with my left hand. I had never had the experience before of being in a car where you’re seated on the opposite, you’re driving on the opposite side, and I had hardly ever in my life gone through a roundabout, which is those big circles where you drive in on one point and you take your exit halfway or three quarters of the way around the circle before it comes back to your entry point. They have those all over the UK and so they were prominent in Ireland. Here I am getting into a nine-passenger van, big vehicle. Ireland is not known for big roads, itty tiny road, nothing resembling a shoulder or a berm. I am seated on the wrong side of the

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vehicle. Fortunately, the shifting went through all the same progressions that it does here in the States but it's on my left side.

I'm pulling out of the car port and instantly making a turn that is the opposite side of the road that I'm used to turning into and found myself right from there in heavy parts of downtown Dublin doing roundabouts and boy, I mean just folks coming in from everywhere. I don't they even know what a police signal would look like but it was crazy chaotic. I was instantly aware, "Wow, I have an area of massive unconscious incompetence and I'm going to have to learn this pronto." This change is not going to be easy but I have to learn. Life has introduced me to an opportunity that I'm going to miss entirely if I don't make some change. Kim, why don't you toss us in kind of a more typical coaching example that somebody might hire a coach for, they want to change, but it's an area of unconscious incompetence.

**KIM:** Yeah and here's the sad reality, we all have, dozens, who knows maybe more, areas of unconscious incompetence. Right now, they are called blind spots and there are things in our lives that we don't even realize are there that could benefit from some change, tweaking, doing something different, or they are causing us difficulty. We're not even sure why that thing is causing us difficulty. We're totally unconscious of what's going on and why we're getting the results we have. So of course nobody who is in complete unconscious incompetence really hires a coach about that thing because they think they are fine. So whether it's their health choices, their relational skills, or their spiritual relationship with the Lord, at any given point in time, we probably think we're fine or we don't realize we need skills that we need. But those things inevitably bump up against life and the consequences and the results start to show up. This is when people might call someone for coaching.

For someone like me, Chris, it's often when somebody decides to train as a coach, start their own coaching business, and they kind of like you said, overlook that huge quadrant of what they didn't know, they didn't know about business building. That is unfortunately a really, really big quadrant. They try the Field of Dreams

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approach to building a coaching business kind of “If I build a website, they will come.”

CHRIS: It doesn't work, does it?

KIM: Well, it's only a dream, right, in Hollywood. So nobody comes and then slowly it starts to dawn on them that “I'm actually incompetent in this area and I didn't know and it's not my fault. I never tried it before but I'm not getting the results I want. So they a coach so that they can move into phase two which you'll explain to us.

CHRIS: Exactly, phase two as you probably have guessed then is just Conscious Incompetence. You can't wave a magic wand or snap your fingers and suddenly become competent at something. You just first become aware. “Whoah, I didn't know that I didn't know that. Now I realize it. Man, what do I do?” As Kim said, that's the point at which oftentimes persons will hire a coach. It's also of course sometimes the case that they are working with you in coaching and as a result of the work you're doing in various areas of phase one, the unconscious incompetence, are kind of unmasked, but certainly when someone hires a coach oftentimes it's because they have stepped into phase two in some area like what I just illustrated there with the vehicle where suddenly you really need to kind of like a book that came out a few years ago was titled *You Need to Change or Die*. If I didn't figure this out pretty quickly, we could have gotten a terrible automobile accident there or the dreams that we had for our trip would have died because I would have had to charter a bus to transport us around or whatever.

Again, a fairly simple life example but that book title, that book, *Change or Die*, really underscored how difficult change is. It was a fascinating study of medical practitioners advising their patients of massive changes that they needed to make, very clear specific changes in diet, in terms of exercise, stress level, or lifestyle and such that if they did not make these changes, they would literally die. It showed that only about 10% of persons in such a life-threatening situation actually made the changes and sustained those changes. Kind of like what Kim pointed out there at the beginning, we might make New Year's resolutions and they work for a week or

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two, but changing and making sustained change are two different things. Even in a situation like what I just illustrated with that book of somebody needing to change or they die, and then you realize but they don't, it really underscores because change is that hard.

I was thinking of a coaching example for this phase. I just came back from a wonderful weekend with one of the mastermind groups that I belonged to and we were each coaching each other about various areas of conscious incompetence, areas where you suddenly realize, "Wow, I need to change." One of my colleagues said, "You know, when I look at technology, I say I'm 66 years old. I know that I'm not good with technology but I ask myself, do I even need to care?" He was internally wrestling with, "Seriously, couldn't I just make another 10 or 15 years and then okay, I'm going to the old folk's home or whatever?" We would never say it out loud but he imposing the question, "Do I need to care?" He was then able in a coach approach to answer that, "Yeah, I do." So okay, I'm squarely in phase two, conscious incompetence. What do I do?

That moves us into phase three of this model which is, again as you probably guessed, Conscious Competence. Again to play off of my experience over in Ireland, we did have a wonderful first week of our trip there. We flew then from there to Italy. They drive on the right side of the road and the right side of the vehicle. We subsequently switched to France and rented a vehicle there where they also drive on the American side of the road and the proper side. We went across the English Channel and so now we were in England. Now I was driving in the correct side of the car but the wrong side of the road. My poor brain by the time this whole trip was over had done everything except drive backwards down the road and around these roundabouts.

In conscious competence, you have identified the change that's needed. You have identified the various steps that you need to make in order to make that change, and you've begun to practice them. You're rehearsing them over and over again. They are not second nature yet. This is a very conscious process. You can easily fall

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back into your previous patterns, your state of not knowing, but typically, you become aware of it especially if you're in a coaching relationship. Your coach will call you back to it, and you consciously choose that new desired behavior, that new desired way of being and you keep moving into greater and greater mastery. Kim, give a coaching example there of something where someone is wrestling through conscious competence.

KIM: I think one of the most common things that my clients and I myself actually have struggled with is to develop consistent exercise routines into our life. We know the health benefits, we know the energy benefits. There are so many good reasons and I'll just use myself as an example here. There was a stretch there about five years ago for about three or four years for health reasons and various reasons. I just stopped exercising. I just didn't have the ability or the bandwidth to do that, but then all of those reasons kind of turned into excuses and I remained on the couch. So I talked with my coach, I did visioning, I tapped into my motivation, and I identified the benefits, but in all honesty, my motivation kind of waxed and waned. It waxed at 3 PM and it waned at 4 AM when I woke up. I just couldn't seem to make myself do it because change is hard and it required so much conscious intention.

I really want to break down the brain science of this here in a minute, but just to stick with the external part of the example, I realized that all of those small behaviors that went into that big thing I call exercise, if I could focus on those and change them one by one, the cascading result would be what I wanted. Instead of tackling, "I must exercise." Here's my thought, "What if I kind of cooperated with the way God made my brain and I just put all my energies into laying out my running clothes next to my bed at night." That was it. When I woke up, I didn't have to exercise. I didn't have to put them on. That was the only change I wanted to conquer. This is really key, Chris, and we'll talk about why here in a minute, but when I do that at night, I celebrate. I do the happy dance. I pat myself on the back and, "Go, Kim!" Why, because the brain likes reward. That's the way God

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wired us and if only beat myself up and I don't reward myself as I make these incremental steps, why would the brain want to repeat it?

I moved from that to, "Okay, I'm going to set my alarm earlier too. Now I'm actually going to put on those running shoes. I'm not going to run but I'm going to put them on." So I'm mastering it one step at a time. Well it didn't take me long into that process. I'm like, "Well I've got my running clothes on and I'm already awake so I might as well go on and exercise." It really sped up there but getting over those first few steps was key celebrating to the point where within six months, I was running a half marathon and I hadn't done that in 10 years. It's all because I was consciously mastering one skill. "Kim, lay out your running shoes the night before." That was my only requirement to myself and if I did that consistently and celebrated, everything else really fell into place. So it's very conscious and I'm taking the big thing and I'm making it small. I'm going for mastery and consistency of that tiny thing. I'm celebrating and I can do that. I can do that night after night.

CHRIS: You really hit on where we're going with this. If this is sounding obvious, hang with us here for a moment because what Kim just hit on is what happens in the brain when we begin to rehearse even simple things that are moving us in the direction of a desired change. The brain works to help us and really propel us eventually along or conversely if we're not doing those things, the brain can very much work against us. That's kind of where we're taking this. Let's wrap up this model and start to shift into that. Phase four is of course Unconscious Competence. Once we finally gained mastery over some new action or way of being, eventually, it becomes habitual. It's just the new normal. It's what we do. If somebody were to check in with us five or 10 years from now, we might have to stop and think, "Well, yeah there was a time when I didn't do that." I remember working on it at a certain phase but now it's like brushing my teeth and taking a shower in the morning or something. It's just what I do. I'll have to say to finish up my little exercise over there in Ireland, I never got to the phase of unconscious competence and there simply wasn't time actually to rehearse those new learned behaviors long

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enough to where anything could become habitual. I remained in phase three, just conscious competence. It was the best I could do with the time limitations before us.

A more typical coaching example would be anybody coaching around some change, like Kim just said of exercise routine or maybe organization in the managing of your office space if you're setting up a coaching practice or something, or the handling of email, the never ending email flood in our boxes. As you consciously practice over and over those new desired behaviors that are moving into the direction of competence that you want to have, eventually they will become unconscious areas of competence. It's just your new normal as I said. Kim, plug us into what happens in the brain when we're challenged with things that are really hard to change?

KIM: It's a great question and one of the fascinating things for me about that model, William Howell's, there are two phases out of that four in which we're supremely happy. We're supremely happy when we're unconsciously competent. "I'm just brushing my teeth. My teeth are always clean. I always get a good dental health checkup. It's a wonderful thing." I'm supremely happy when I'm unconsciously incompetent. Before I even know I have to change, it's not bothering me. It might be bothering other people but it's not bothering me, say, that I never brush my teeth if I never know I'm supposed to. The two phases that we're unhappy in are conscious incompetence and conscious competence. That's where change, New Year's resolutions, and those types of things often come to a dead halt. Things get hard or we get distracted and pulled away, and we misinterpret what's going on with our brains and we think, "I knew I could not do this. See, this really is too hard. Oh, I didn't really want this anyway." We tell ourselves the wrong message, "I can't master this skill," when in reality, were' just in phase two of a four-phase process. If we stick with it, it will become unconscious competence.

Here's what's going on in the brain as we try to create this successful change. I'm just thinking about two parts of the brain here so I'm not going to get too technical

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frankly because I don't have the ability. I'm not a neurologist to get too technical. I'm going to keep it easy but it really helps me understand things when I know how designed me. Up in the front of our brain, right behind our forehead is our prefrontal cortex. It's where we make decisions, logic, creativity. Everything important that I like in my life that goes on is usually the result of my prefrontal cortex. Here's the thing. It can't handle a lot. It doesn't have a lot of bandwidth. It can only really put two or three things in there at time, even simple things. If you ask me to remember a phone number and didn't put a dash in the middle, seven digits, most of us could never memorize it. That's why they put a dash in the middle. It's still seven digits but we can group it into group of three and a group of four. Now our prefrontal cortex can handle it.

Change takes a lot of bandwidth as I think about you trying to shift the car and remember the gears, pick the lane, and understand the roundabout and watch what other people are doing. It overloads my prefrontal cortex to imagine it, Chris. That's the way change is for brain. We try to, let's say, integrate an exercise routine into our life and there's actually a lot of moving pieces between getting up early, getting on the clothes, and seeing myself as an exerciser and worrying about the muscle pain and on it goes. So when my kid gets sick, something happens at work, or relationships start to sour, my prefrontal cortex has to take its bandwidth and put it in that urgent place and now it has run out. It doesn't have anything left for this change I'm trying to make, to integrate exercise, or to be sweeter to my spouse or to pay more attention to my relationship with the Lord throughout the day. All those things we want to do it just can't handle it.

CHRIS: Kim, it's really like RAM in our computers, isn't it? That Random Access Memory, our working memory in our computer. You get too many windows open with too many different files all running at the same time, you start to notice everything slows down and gums up in your computer. There's just too much in there. You clear it out and suddenly the computer works. You didn't have a virus. You didn't have anything wrong. No malware in there, just too many things all in current RAM, in that case, same way with our prefrontal cortex. It can only handle

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too much. You get too many other things there – life’s stress, problems, distractions, and all – and it just kind of goes, “Well, I’ll keep slugging through here” but nothing is going to really do very well.” You want change? I don’t know. That’s going to go way down the list.

KIM: It is so critical to know that as you think about working with your direct reports, your employees, your clients, even other members of your family. Just because we can cognitively understand what needs to happen doesn’t mean this new skill, this is a learning model that we can actually seamlessly employ each part without a lot of training and practice. You’re absolutely right which is why God created the basal ganglia, which exists kind of at the back of our neck, the small part of our brain. This is where habits are formed. Truly, I think the statistic is 60% or more of everything we do during the day is a result of habit.

It doesn’t take conscious competence or decision at all. It just happens and God created our brain to recognize patterns and to start to habituate those things so we could free up the floor space of our prefrontal cortex for what’s most immediate or what’s most important. The key for us is to take this new skill, this change, this learning, break it down and practice it consistently, make it a routine and at small pieces so they start to move back to the basal ganglia. Research has shown that actually even after three repetitions of something pretty basic that the brain is starting to form those patterns. It’s eager to pick up and habituate that for us so it doesn’t have to keep thinking about it.

I think about the possibilities for us as we’re working with clients, employees, other people in our life, or our own selves about change. We don’t have to get so discouraged that it’s hard. Sometimes the answer is simply to simplify it, make it consistent. Charles Duhigg has done some great research on this in *The Power of Habit*. BJ Fogg at Stanford University, I’ve had the opportunity to train with him under his system he calls Tiny Habits. Just take something that we do well and we do habitually, link the new behavior to it, and then follow it up with celebration at

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the backend, just something really simple and we are making and creating a new habit.

CHRIS: I love it. Every time we talk about anything having to do with brain science, you're so instantly reminded that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. It's incredible that the Lord would have put in place the very thing that we so desperately need to help us with that problem that otherwise would make life pretty insurmountable. If you had to do everything consciously, wow. When I got back to the states and finally was able to drive on the side of the car that I'm used to driving on. I don't have a stick shift car but if I did, shifting again with my right hand and driving on the side of the road that I'm used to and not having those awful roundabouts, it didn't take any time at all before I was back at a level of unconscious competence on the highway so much so that I could make the two-and-a-half-hour drive home from the St. Louis Airport here to our farm largely unconscious even of whether or not the light was green or the light was red.

I obviously stopped but that basal ganglia was taking care of reminding me, "Oh yeah, you know this. You got this. Don't need to worry about it. You can go into unconscious mode." I'm just flying along the highway. I slowed down when I needed to slow down, I turned right, I turned left. I turned right again. There's that largely unconscious functioning because of the different parts of the brain having worked in tandem well enough that they each know what they needed to take care of.

KIM: Absolutely and it gives us great hope that we really can create. We don't have to be like that 10%. We can really increase the percentage of people who make changes, sustainable change in our life when we work in cooperation with the way God made us to change.

CHRIS: This is a perfect topic for us here as we wrap up the year and we're heading into New Year's and New Year's resolutions. Most of us still dare to make those and hopefully, you've gained something that might serve as a bit of a challenge for you here from today's topic. Kim and I were talking about verses that come to mind

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before today's episode and Galatians 6:9 seems a particular good one from the message. It reads this way, "So let's not allow ourselves to get fatigued doing good. At the right time, we will harvest a good crop if we don't give up or quit."

It's a beautiful challenge to all of us. Just don't get too fatigued in the frustration, the difficulties of change. As you set your New Year's resolutions, impress into them for very good reason, knowing what your motivation is behind them, then don't give up. Don't quit. When you don't follow the new pattern, just consciously go back and rehearse the right behavior again, the right way of being again. Give yourself those small rewards. Allow the brain its time to lay down those new tracks and to habituate some new behaviors and some new ways of being.

**KIM:** Absolutely and as we continue into this New Year, I am going to encourage if this has been helpful to you, we pray that it has that you would consider making us a habitual part of your weekly life and listening schedule. Also please leave us an honest review and a rating on iTunes. Connect with us on Facebook. We would love to hear the kind of changes that God is working in your life

**CHRIS:** Yes indeed. Until next time and next year, keep raising the standard and changing the world.

**KIM:** God's richest blessings to you.