



# PROFESSIONAL CHRISTIAN COACHING TODAY

Chris McCluskey & Kim Avery

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

## Episode 021

### Defining Your Coaching Niche

CHRIS: We have an important topic for today – Choosing Your Coaching Niche. I think, Kim, we probably better get that word right out on the table, right off the bat, don't you? Is it niche or niche? We're going to address that big question and several other really important questions actually about niching your coaching services. Stay tuned for that. Let's get that word out on the table. So often, we'll hear people talking about niching or niching themselves, and let's just kind of say that to be clear on the word, it is spelled N-I-C-H-E but that is of course a French word. We, being English speaking persons, we tend normally to pronounce it as niche. Both are proper but Kim and I have the opinion that it's a little bit pretentious to pronounce it as niche and people don't generally say niching or "I niched myself" so we're going to stick with the more typical English pronunciation of niche, but the word is important to even understand in terms of its origin.

A niche is kind of an ornamental recess. If you think about a wall that has some kind of a concave area into it that might hold a small statue or something, that is what the word refers to. A niche comes from the Latin word meaning nest. It's a place where something can be set or where something fits, and so when we speak about niching in any regard with the marketplace, we're looking for a clear

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identification of where it is that we fit in the marketplace or who are our ideal clientele that we're trying to attract to our services.

KIM: Right and it's an important question and it's also a hard topic. It's hard to wrap your mind around if I want to get as many clients as possible, why in the world would I niche myself? I'm really glad we're diving into this today. I remember years ago when I sat in your Successful Coach Class and I was listening to you describe many of the things that are important to build a business. You came upon this niching topic and you kind of kicked it off with this great general metaphor about fishing. Now I'm not a big fisher person one way or the other but the metaphor made so much sense to me, I thought it might be a good way to kind of wrap the whole discussion up in words we could use throughout. If you don't mind, why don't you lead off with that?

CHRIS: Well, yeah, it's a fun metaphor. We all think best when we can put a picture to something. As they say, a picture is worth a thousand words. I'm not a big fisher person either but all of us can relate to at least helping a child learn how to fish with a little Zebco Rod & Reel and putting a barb around the end and a little worm on a hook and tossing it in the water. Typically if you're trying to teach a child how to fish, there are so many nuanced things to learn in fishing that one of the first things you want to do is take them to a fish hatchery, some kind of a stocked pond that a farmer maybe has in your area or you go to the state fish hatchery or something where pretty much if they can get the line into the water and the barb is still floating there, something is going to nibble on the end of it because what you're really trying to help them learn is just how to push the button, flip the rod without tossing it out of their hand, get the line out there, and watch the barb and when the barber goes down, that means the fish is nibbling. You want to let him get a little bit of the worm in his mouth before you just yank on it because you might jerk it out of his mouth but don't let him pick on it so long that he actually eats the whole thing and then you pull up an empty hook.

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There are a lot of things to help a child learn in just basic fishing or to carry the metaphor over to what we're talking about here, in basic marketing. But once a child gets the hang of fishing, normally we don't just go to fish hatcheries. You pay a lot. You pay probably more than your fish is worth by the time you pay your fees to get into a fish hatchery. But once somebody gets excited about fishing, they might actually make a decision as an adult to say, "You know I want to make my living. I want to provide for my family by fishing." Well now at that point, when you've gone from "I enjoy fishing. Fishing is kind of neat. It's a nice hobby" to "I love fishing enough that I think I'd like to make it the way that I provide for my family, my primary source of income," you now have a whole new set of challenges before you and one of the biggest is figuring out, "Okay, what kind of fishing?" What kind of fish do you want to go after because the world is full of all different kind of fishes – salt water and fresh water, and some of them are found in still bodies of water like a pond or a lake, others are in running water like streams and rivers, some are going to be out in the ocean or surf casting and chartering boats. There are all different places that we go – deep sea fishing and various ways then that we get before them. Well all of the decisions that need to be made now when you've decided I want to make my living this way, come down to identifying your desire to catch or for today's topic, your niche. What kind of clientele are you trying to attract primarily through your marketing efforts?

We'll unpack that metaphor a little bit further but I'll just kind of toss in this little piece before putting it back to you, Kim. I said I'm not much of a fisherman but I did go on a recent business fishing trip last year up into Vancouver, British Columbia and we were going salmon fishing or at least that was the primary niche that we were going after. We were trying to find salmon principally Chinook or Coho salmon. But while we were out there, of course there are many other fishes in the water to be caught and at the depths that we were fishing off of the kind of boats that we were in with the kinds of rigs we were running and the kind of bait that they were using, all of that also brought into our boat halibut, ling cod, rock

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fish. It could even brought in tuna, it didn't, but in other words, when we are talking about a niche, we actually often expand it a little bit to niches – plural – as well, right?

KIM: Yes. What's really neat, I think, and we'll get into this in a minute about the concept of niching is people really are attracted by confidence and clarity, and it's the most amazing thing I found when people are willing to commit to a niche or niches, they not only attract more people because it's their niche, they actually more attract more people outside their niche as well, similar to what you're saying and so I think niching is good on all kinds of levels. Chris, in all honesty, it's one of those concepts I just had a hard time wrapping my mind around when I first began coaching. I really felt like and I know it's true, a good coaching principle is as trained professional coaches. You and I can coach almost anyone about almost anything. We don't have to be experts in that area because we're expert coaches. We know what we're doing and they are the ones who know the solutions to their problem. Unfortunately though, that coaching principle doesn't always translate one to one into marketing and so taking that coaching principle that I was qualified to coach almost anyone about anything, I went out into the marketplace, similar to kind of a euphemistic Miss America speech, "I just want to help everyone everywhere" and my heart was really in a good place for that, right?

CHRIS: Yeah, yeah absolutely.

KIM: But my message wasn't clear and it didn't deeply resonate or as you would say, the bait wasn't specific enough that it was really interesting or attractive to anyone. So it seemed risky, it seemed scary, but I really needed to kind of take and commit to this idea of niching, and so just because I know a lot of people might be on the borderline today, I would like to almost begin our discussion with just three. There are probably dozens but three of the benefits of niching your coaching practice so people can understand the power in making this kind of decision.

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CHRIS: Yeah.

KIM: I think the first one is it gives you and I as coaches, it gives us some leverage. We could wake up, right, on any given day of the week and market our coaching services in hundreds of different places. It can almost be that analysis paralysis. How do I decide where do I go? Should I go to the rotary meeting or the business women's meeting or the dieter's group on Facebook? Maybe I should touch base with people at church and there's an overwhelming amount of choices, and so back to your fishing analogy, how do I know where the fish are going to be and what bait to use so that I can successfully attract them? You and I aren't Coach or Nike. We can't really afford to blanket the world in terms of time or money and take our message to everyone everywhere. We really want a leveraged use of our marketing time and resources and so niching really gives us that opportunity to use our time wisely, to get the best results for our time and our money.

CHRIS: Yeah, you know somebody just contacted me, one of the big named podcasters out there a couple of weeks ago, giving a word of praise for us of this podcast here, Kim. What their comment to us was, "Nice job of niching yourself." Well, think about the name of this podcast – Professional Christian Coaching Today – and what they are really saying was, this is a person who has got hundreds of thousands of listeners to them on their podcast every week and they are saying, "Now that podcasting is not just brand new and persons are coming out, they need to niche themselves so much more specifically so that they can draw or in your word – leverage – the kind of attraction points that are going to be needed in order to get a followership. He was saying, "You guys have identified yourself not just as coaches but as professional grade coaches, ICF aligned and specifically Christian coaches. You have a fairly tight niche and that's why you are drawing the large audience that you are because as soon as they see even your name, let alone hear a few of the episodes, if they are interested in professional grade coaching and they are a Christian, they know without question you're the one they want to listen to.

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KIM: Yeah and it goes across all boards. So it goes for coaching, it goes for podcasting. I often tease and say, you don't see a pediatrician advertising in the AARP Magazine or in the retirement home, pediatricians putting their pamphlets on the table because they want to make the best use of their marketing time and resources, they want to go to certain places and then what they have invested is really going to pay off for them. One, niching provides more leverage with what we do but above and beyond that, it increases our visibility. Take that same principle of going to specific places where there are people. We've talked about this on the show before that people need to hear our marketing message an average of 7-12 times before they think about hiring us, 7-12 times. If I did go to the rotary, the business person's meeting, the church meeting and a dozen other places, let's say I went to one networking group a month for an entire year and I went to a different one, they would all meet me one time. What happened to my 7-12 times? Right there, I've missed out on that opportunity for visibility, for familiarity, for the know, like, and trust factor to form.

I've often told people if you had to choose between 12 different groups over a year or one group 12 times, you're going to be better off however counter intuitive it is with the one group 12 different times. The other part of visibility is not only since they are niched group they are going to run into you there, they are likely to be in the same online group and maybe using the same keywords on Facebook and probably reading the same magazines that you want to be publishing an article in, and on and on it goes. They are going to bump into you everywhere because it's a much smaller pond.

CHRIS: You're making far better use of yourself and it sounds counterintuitive at first to you say I'm going to go for a smaller group of persons and that's going to increase my visibility. I don't get that. Shouldn't I be going after a larger group? No because you'll just essentially disappear. If you're trying to be everything to everybody, as they say, you will wind up being nothing to nobody because your voice just gets drowned out. Your presence gets lost in all the other noise and

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distractions, all the other “me too’s” out there. It’s when we narrow our focus, going for that greater leverage and we actually do gain greater visibility that you think about a garden hose when you narrow the focus and tighten it down or kind of crimp your thumb over it or something, suddenly, you get a lot more force from it. You get greater visibility before the people you’re actually trying to attract and they hear you. They experience you over and over and over again.

The greater visibility is not necessarily in numbers of people hearing you, it’s number of times that they are hearing you and sense in which they are connecting you, they are getting your connection to your brand and they are going, “Oh yeah. That’s the go-to. That’s the person I want to go.” When the day comes that I’m hiring a coach, that’s the one I want because they know what they are talking about, the things that interests me.

KIM: Yeah. We even have our proverb in our society about this, right? “Better to be a big fish in a small pond,” and I think that’s the kind of visibility we’re talking about today, really getting known as somebody who can help in this particular pond. The third benefit because I really want to save time for us to dive into how do I find the sweet spot. How do I find the stocked pond of people? The third benefit, I really just wanted to mention today is that of clear messaging. Once you’ve narrowed the people you’re reaching out to specific interest group or people group, something like that, you’re really going to get to know their desires and their struggles, what’s important to them. You’re going to know how they talk about it so that you can use their language and their words back to them, and you’re going to get that deep resonance of, “She’s been reading my email. How did he know I was struggling with that?” Because whether it’s recently divorced people, people who want to better marriage, people who are home schooling their children, or church ministers, they all talk about their problems differently and you want to really be able to use the language that they use and it just makes it so much easier too to choose that language once you hear them talking about their problems.

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CHRIS: It really does. When we talk about choosing a niche here, again we want to underscore, we're actually talking niches – plural – but you want to begin by identifying one primary group of persons that you're trying to appeal to and probably begin to really focus your energies on that group of persons – who are they, where are they going to be found, how do I get to them, what's going to attract them, what's the topics and the language and all that they are interested in, the issues that they might want to coach around – and then you just begin to present that, call it bait, to that group as you do. Just like I was saying at the beginning with fishing for salmon, you may not always catch just that clientele. You may catch the halibut and the ling cod or whatever else swimming that pond.

So you might be targeting, for example, mothers of preschoolers but a young mother brought her mother to the MOPS group or something. That woman hears you and realizes that you could help her in a different season of parenting that is maybe about letting go or preparing. She doesn't have a vision yet for the grand parenting years or some other gap area in her life. Well, are you not going to take that client? No, certainly. You might not only enjoy that client, you might decide there's a second niche I want to go after. That's fine. Stick still with your first niche. Think about the other one. Go back through again - okay, who is that target audience, where are they going to be found, how do I get to them? I'm not going to MOPS groups for the most part to find other clients like that person and what's going to attract them. Maybe they do read AARP or something.

When we expand beyond one niche to probably 3-5 primary niche areas that we're looking to build our coaching business around, we take each one individually and really noodle it through, really think through who are those people, what are the primary areas of gap in their life that I could coach them around. Now, where do they gather? What do they read? Who do they listen to? What podcasts do they follow or what blogs do they follow? What magazines do they take? What conferences do they attend? What networking organizations do they belong to? You're thinking always in terms of that group of persons with

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those specific issues and then you'll move to another one to where eventually you'll have again probably 3-5 primary niche areas that you're targeting.

KIM: I'm a multi-niched coach and I know a lot of people like me enjoy variety in their day and it's fine to have more than one niche and often a really good business idea to do that, but again to speak their language, often we start with one and then we expand, discover, learn, and grow. I don't know if niching is ever really a permanent decision therefore always just kind of nuancing our messaging and learning as the years go along. I like to look at people's old websites sometimes and then their new ones and see how they have changed.

CHRIS: Oh yeah.

KIM: That's just a sign of wisdom, you know, as we learn who we like to work with, who we're effective with, who is responding to our message. We just shift and change. So none of this is permanent and concrete, but it's worth doing and learning as we go.

CHRIS: Kim, you have a model that you use. I've seen it either on your website or in one of the courses that you teach that you call the Golden Rule of Business. It kind of paints the picture of what I just described there about going after different groups and the convergence of the persons and their issues and you building out your business. Can you unpack that model for us?

KIM: Yes, I would love to. I call it the Golden Rule of Business and I do want to say that all of this thinking is not probably completely original with me but I don't know what wise persons I've learned it from, so I'd like to give them credit if I could. Let me define the Golden Rule of Business and then I'm going to give a visual which I think will be very helpful.

I'm going to say it twice because it's so important. Here's the golden rule: Target a group of people who already know they have a problem and are willing to pay money to solve it. One last time, target a group of people who already know they

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have a problem and are willing to pay money to solve it. This is kind of the sweet spot. We can't always hit it spot on but this is where it's easiest to get at least our first coaching clients. In other words, we're not just looking for people and trying to sell them on the value of coaching. These are people who already know they have a desire or problem that they really like help with and they have demonstrated the ability and the willingness to pay money to have this problem solved.

I'd like to flesh it out with one of those old fashioned Venn Diagrams that they gave us in Geometry class. Picture as you're listening, two circles that slightly overlap right there in the middle and then a third circle either above it or below it, it doesn't really matter, and it overlaps with the other two so that there's a spot right in the middle where they have all overlapped. That's the sweet spot and that's where we can really find clients who are willing and eager to work with us and to pay for it.

Let me define each circle real quick. They all start with P. The first one is P for people group. In that circle, we want to think about a specific group of people who are gathering together around a common interest or a common problem. This is what Chris and I were talking about a few minutes ago about how do you know where to go. Do you go to the MOPS Group, the rotary club, or the business women's association for a meeting? You want a group of people who are gathering together around a specific problem. Think about again how leveraged this is, Chris. If my niche were mothers of preschoolers, I could go to the Kiwanis, I could go to the church, I could go to the business women's association and hope that 20% of the people in the room might be mothers who have preschoolers at home or I could just go to one group. I could go to MOPS and every single person in that room is in my target market. That's a smart way to market your business.

CHRIS: It is and it underscores what I was saying again back at the very beginning of the podcast about identifying the kind of fish that you're trying to attract. They only

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congregate principally in specific areas. You are not going to catch salt water fish in fresh water or vice versa, but even when you're in those fresh water or salt water bodies, there might be the stray occasional this or that fish but the primary ones that you're going after, they school together so you learn all of the information about where do they school, what depth do they school, what kinds of bait are they primarily drawn to, what are their migratory paths? There are so many things to think through in being very intentional about how you increase the likelihood that you're going to be before the clients you want to attract. That's where having identified them very clearly upfront - this is my desired niche, this is my catch that I'm looking for – then you can make your decisions really wisely about where you're going to spend your time, where you're going to spend your money and your efforts in marketing.

**KIM:** Yeah, and it's not just offline, it's online as well. If you just went on Facebook or LinkedIn and you kind of looked through all the various groups, you'll find that the groups often gather around the kind of people they are – they are school teachers, they are nurses, they are recently divorced people, they are engaged people. People gather together around their common interests and so whether it's offline or online, once you identify a people group, you can go where they are and that just makes good sense.

Following that, our second to that then our second circle which also starts with P and this is the problem. The problem could also represent a desire for fulfillment but the problem that people are struggling with. So say these school teachers are gathering together, these physicians, or these young moms, they may not be interested in coaching for coaching's sake. They may not even really understand the value that professional coaching can bring to their life.

And so I'd like to think about this problem area, think about what is waking them up at 2 AM. Waking up this mom of preschoolers at 2 AM probably isn't, "I need a coach," but she's probably wondering about potty training, about how to send her kids to school, about how to raise Christ-centered children and raising Godly

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children in this very ungodly world that we live in. The list goes on and on for all the different kinds of niches and so those things wake her up. This is what, when she wakes up at 2 AM and she goes to Google, she's going to type in the search bar, "how to potty train my child" or "How to raise Godly children."

When she has coffee with a friend, this is what they are going to talk about. "Well, what are you doing with your children? How could I do that with my children?" Thus, when somebody knows that you're coach working around that people group with that problem or if you happen to go to MOPS or that thing and you say, "This is what I help people with," again there's that immediate resonance of "Oh my goodness, that's just what I've been struggling with" and it triggers them to have a conversation with you.

CHRIS: We've referenced mothers of preschoolers in particular here but we just really want to be sure that people are hearing lots of range of areas that you could coach in. Health and wellness is one of the really hot areas in coaching. Persons are aware if they do not have good health or they are not practicing good wellness kind of lifestyle decisions and so they go online looking for help in that area that fits with the definition that Kim was recommending we operate under, a group of people who already know they have a problem and they are willing to pay money to solve it. The same way with business persons, executives, executives in positions of leadership whose jobs are facing all kinds of constant change and challenge, emotional quotient, EQ kind of self awareness and self leadership adapting to the rapidly changing marketplace, working with work teams, these are what these executives are going to bed at night thinking about and what they wake up thinking on at 2 AM. They go online looking for help with these things.

You want to be positioned in such a way that you come up either in their searches or you're the guest speaker at their next Christian business persons' luncheon or the conference that they attend. It may be marriage enrichment that you are trying to niche. It may be retirement planning, persons who are preparing for moving out of the workforce at least in the part time work or slowing down. It might be

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life in ministry that you're targeting as a specific niche. What are the things that persons who live in the fishbowl of life in the ministry wake up at 2 AM thinking about? What are the problems that they are facing that they are already aware of that they would be willing to pay money to get help with? That's where you want to do your fishing.

KIM: Sure and I think about it sometimes again that this is a marketing principle. It's almost that trigger response that will bring them to the front door of your house, as it were, which represents your coaching practice. Once they have connected with you, can you still coach them on things on life purpose, fulfillment, balance, values, all of the things that we really value as coaches and understand, help people live better more intentional purposeful lives. It doesn't just mean we're going to coach them on that one thing. It's this marketing principle of "I've got to have them at least here what I'm saying enough to have a conversation with me either by looking at my website or conversing with me," and then once we get in a relationship, we all know that most of these other things end up coming up as well.

CHRIS: They really do and so Kim, you've walked through two of these three circles of your Venn diagram here. The people group that we're going for, the problem identifications that they principally have, there's a third P here that's a pretty important one, right?

KIM: It is and believe it or not, this is I think the most overlooked part of our Venn diagram. That third P is profit. Now, there are certainly a large number of people that God is calling to use coaching in their work place, use coaching as a pastor in their church, use coaching as a hobby or just as a side business. That's great but for people who really are feeling called to this as a profession and God is saying to them, "This is how I want you to pay your bills, support your family." It's more than a hobby, it's a business and so we have to put on our business hat and make sure it's profitable. Here's the sad reality in our society and the way it's just structured. Some niches can afford more money than others. Some niches

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are more willing to pay money for services than others, just to their awareness and familiarity with the value of services.

For example, we get a large number of people who come through the Professional Christian Coaching Institute, as you know Chris, who are really interested in working with missionaries overseas because they need so much support, and coaching can provide that and it's a wonderful thing, but unless God brings a third party payer into the system or something unusual happens, that usually not their primary niche that they can use to support their family full time because we all know, missionaries just don't have any disposable income as it were to use some things like coaching. It would be great if they did but they don't. If this is your business, you need to do some sort of research, some sort of investigation and prayer on is this niche that I'm considering going to be able to bring in the income that I need for the lifestyle that God has called me to?

CHRIS: I'm so glad that we're putting that out there clearly. I realize that this may be the point at which some of our listeners bristle a little bit. Everything else was sounding great, how exciting, how fun to work with people that I really identify with around issues that I care about, but wait a minute, it has got to be profitable. Remember, we're looking at something here that is more than a hobby. This is a business. This is not just I enjoy fishing. This is I want to make a living and provide for my family by fishing. I need to be clear on what kind of fish I'm going after, where they are so that when I catch them and I bring them into the dock, I know what they are going to bring in the fish market. I know what they are going to sell for and how many of them I have to catch in order to provide and keep the lights on in my home and send my kids to school and whatever the things are that draw on my money.

Those three pieces of the model, as you called it the sweet spot, Kim, they all really do need to converge pretty closely with each other, specific people groups that you identify with and care about, specific problems that persons in those people groups identify with and say, "Wow, this is an area of gap. I want this to

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be different. I want to close this” and then are those people groups with those problems ones who can pay enough for your service if you get x number of those clients to where, by golly, that really could be a business. If so, then you’ve got the convergence of the three Ps. You’ve got your sweet spot. Now, you know where to go fishing and how to find those fish.

KIM: It’s a beautiful place to be. I often think about this verse in Romans 12:6 that says God has given each of us the ability to do certain things well and I think it just fits with realizing our humanity, our limitations, and our gifts and strengths that there are probably certain people groups around certain problems that I work better with, that God has prepared me for from the beginning of time, from before the beginning of time, I guess, to work with them and then to work with me, and so when we’re thinking about that business model, finding that convergence between the people group, the problem, and the profit really does seem to be a sweet spot and a great place to start your niching efforts.

CHRIS: Well, if this has drawn your attention and has you thinking about your ideal niches, you may be interested in a group that Kim has that is starting here in March, March 9<sup>th</sup> actually I believe. March 9<sup>th</sup> from 5-6 Eastern time, Kim is going to be doing a six-week group called My Ideal Niche. It’s all about helping coaches work through identification of their ideal niche and figuring out then how to appeal to that niche, how to do that kind of fishing, how to appeal to those kinds of clients. If you’re interested in information on that, you’ll find it on Kim’s website. That’s at [KimAveryCoaching.com/MyNiche](http://KimAveryCoaching.com/MyNiche).

KIM: I would love to hear from them and I also want to mention, Chris, that at [ProfessionalChristianCoachingToday.com](http://ProfessionalChristianCoachingToday.com), our podcast website, we do have that new great free download for people called 50 Hottest Niches in Coaching. It’s great to be able to get an overview of what other people are doing, what they are finding to be profitable, meaningful, and really viable in this marketplace. I would encourage people to go there and definitely check out that download as well.

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CHRIS: So you know the drill. Until next time, keep raising the standard of coaching in changing the world.

KIM: God's richest blessings to you.