



# PROFESSIONAL CHRISTIAN COACHING TODAY

Chris McCluskey & Kim Avery

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

## Episode 034

### Strengths-Based Living & Coaching

CHRIS: Strengths Based Living and Coaching. If you have heard yourself or your clients saying things like, “I just can’t do this. I can’t do it all.” The good news is you’re right. It sounds like bad news but it’s good news really because you can’t do it all and you weren’t meant to do it all, and that’s what we’re addressing on today’s topic and looking at playing to our strengths – strengths based living - and then working with our clients – strengths based coaching. Romans 12:6 tells us very clearly, “In His grace God has given us different gifts” and the New Living Translation says, “God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well.” Now, that doesn’t mean that we can’t do other things that are not in our areas of strength or gifting, but it does say we’re probably not going to do them nearly so well. They are going to be incredibly more frustrating and it may be that the message for us to read there is that somebody else would be the better one to do that piece. Part of what we’re looking at today is of course delegating, prioritizing, and ensuring that we are stewarding for the best and the highest, the greatest strengths the Lord has placed within us. So tune in today as we look at some specific ways to identify what your strengths are and then how you and your clients can transition to more strengths based living. Kim, take us into kind of what are our key points we’re going to look at.

# PROFESSIONAL CHRISTIAN COACHING TODAY

---

KIM: Yeah. Well, we're going to start with the basics. So what is important about this area of strengths based living and then four ways that we, as coaches, can work with our clients, obviously ourselves but also our clients to identify their strengths? It's really important, I think, to think what are we listening for, how are we helping our clients identify them just organically even in a natural coaching session, and then of course making that all important transition to living from our strengths primarily - never exclusively - primarily and we're going to end with a call to action. I hope you're ready to go out and take some action on what we're talking about today.

Let's back up, what is important about strengths based living? It's probably been well over a decade since Gallup unveiled the results of a landmark 30-year research project they did and it really has ignited like a global conversation around this topic of strengths. What they discovered is that every person is born with kind of a cluster of signature strengths. These aren't talents necessarily or skills that you learn but strengths, things that endure overtime in a variety of situations. What was fascinating to me though is they discovered that most organizations and, dare I add, probably most people spend most of their lives not focusing on their strengths but instead on their weaknesses, thinking about them, pointing them out to other people, ruminating about them, trying to remediate them.

Oh my goodness, I know I so fall into that category but in spite of all those efforts, what they discovered was those weakness based corporations continued to slog along in mediocrity. One of the examples they gave really hit home with me, Chris, was imagine that you have a baseball team and a star pitcher who consistently pitches no hitting games, and then one day you look at his batting average and you say, "Oh my goodness. He's the worst hitter on the team. He needs more time in batting practice." Well, that is not time well spent. He's never going to improve that much more in his batting and think the difference his

# PROFESSIONAL CHRISTIAN COACHING TODAY

---

pitching makes to the team. So I'm not a baseball player but even that made sense to me.

CHRIS: Well you know what, I'm not a baseball player either but I follow it enough to know that actually, that is a very common real life situation. Oftentimes in professional league ball, any league of baseball players, your pitcher is one of if not the worst batter on the team. So it really underscores what they are saying. Not only are they incredibly gifted there and that's a lot of what helps the team win the game is that the pitcher is so good but that probably comes at a cost that his batting is not typically very good. That's not to say don't do anything with his batting but it is to say you're going to spend hours in every practice for this guy having him try to incrementally inch up his batting average or are you going to keep working him in those practices primarily just improving and strengthening and keeping sharp his pitching edge. Of course you're going to play to the strength.

KIM: Well, that is of course but I don't know. It doesn't always work out that way in real life, at least for me. I just think real quick of a personal example. One time I was president of a women's organization and I think I was in my areas of strength. I really liked getting the speakers and meeting the people and trying to drive membership and all of those exciting things. The next year, I decided I really need to cut back my time in this organization. I'll take a lesser position that won't take as much time and I became group treasurer. Anybody who knows me who is listening to the call is cracking up right now because of the thing, "Well Kim, you don't even balance your checkbook correctly and all of a sudden, you're treasurer of this organization." I spent so much time and energy checking and rechecking and making sure and agonizing and learning new software and all of those things. I was in a weakness based area and it consumed so much more of my time and talent than if I had stayed in my area of strength. That's what Gallup discovered that 20% of organizations did that. They focused on their strengths and these organizations weren't just slightly more successful, they were wildly

# PROFESSIONAL CHRISTIAN COACHING TODAY

---

successful compared to the weakness based organizations. That's the importance of strengths based living.

CHRIS: It really is the motto of Gallup and that was maximize your strengths and as much as possible delegate your weakness. We all have them. We all have weaknesses and sometimes, we have to work in them but as much as possible, delegate those weaknesses and maximize your strengths. Just don't play to them, strengthen them. Strengthen the strengths. That's going to give you not incrementally better improvements, it's going to give you exponentially greater improvement. It's going to blow the roof off and Kim, just a primo example of this that is in our generation and we're all very familiar with is the amazing turnaround that happened at Apple Computers. We saw the meteoric rise of Steve Jobs in Apple and then him being fired from his own company and disappearing and struggling through next computers and then in the midst of that developing Pixar but when he came back to Apple and there was that, "Wow, Steve is back and Apple can survive again."

Apple was so deeply in the red that even the world's greatest leaders, not somebody who had been fired from his own company but the world's greatest leaders at that time really would have had their challenge cut out for them in trying to turn that company around. It just seemed basically impossible. There was so much weakness and if anybody, well, I've been reading recently the big book that came out just last fall, *Becoming Steve Jobs*. It's a great analysis of his life but in it, they talk through, "Well, how does that happen and what did he do?" They were really clear. Steve came in and said there are only a few things we're going to be able to do really well and he whittled everything down to four key areas product lines, that matrix of four key areas. Everything had to fit into it and whatever else didn't, went.

I'm telling you man, when I read through that book and looked at the list of the really cool sounding projects that got axed I thought, "Are you kidding me?" How much sunk cost had gone into those things? How many people had to have

# PROFESSIONAL CHRISTIAN COACHING TODAY

---

their jobs repositioned or just let go and downsized in order to focus on only those four areas. But Steve's quote is, I'll simply read it to us here. He says, "People think focus means saying yes to the thing you've got to focus on, but that's not what it means at all. It means saying no to the hundred other good ideas that there are. You have to pick carefully." I love this. He says, "I'm actually as proud of the things we haven't done as the things I have done. Innovation is saying no to a thousand things." So focusing on strength areas and playing principally or he would say almost exclusively to those, yeah, exponential turnaround kind of impact in the person's life and in the life of a huge organization like that.

KIM: Wow, that is a powerful example and motivation, I think, for us as coaches, but then it comes to this area of working with our clients and our clients are really no different than us. So like most of us, I'm much more acutely aware of my weaknesses than I am of my own strengths. This is often the situation with clients. They come in and say, "I can't do this. I'm not good at that. I'm having trouble with this," and they are acutely aware of their weaknesses, ignoring, forgetting, or just not seeing their strengths. We want to think about for a minute, just what are some ways that we can help them discover and/or notice and play to those strengths? It doesn't have to be a long complicated solution.

I'll tell you one example, Chris. When I worked with coaches on branding themselves, so not just branding their coaching business but branding themselves. Why am I as a coach unique? Is it because I'm energetic or because I have more experience or because I'm gregarious or whatever it is? What are my unique strengths? When coaches face this question, they often just draw blank. "Well, I'm not special. There's no difference between me and everybody else" and we know of course God made each of us unique, masterpiece. I go with it a very simple solution. One of them is ask your colleagues and friends. Just shoot out an email and say, "What are three things that really pop to your mind when you think of me?" or "How would you describe me? How have I blessed you?" Just a simple question to your colleagues and friends asking for some feedback and it's

## PROFESSIONAL CHRISTIAN COACHING TODAY

---

amazing 1) how affirming it is for the client to get this kind of feedback, but 2) it's just again so obvious that these things are so ingrained to them. They thought, "Well, doesn't everybody think strategically?" Oh my goodness. You mean everybody is not creative like that? They don't see the world through that lens?" They didn't even realize the strengths that they had and so it brings in new and heightened awareness. Just a simple exercise like asking other people can really help someone move forward in that area.

CHRIS: Making yourself vulnerable enough to say, "I know I must have strengths. I'm not really sure what they are. What do you see as my strengths?" Then listening very carefully and asking for examples. Especially if they are sharing some things and you're going, "Really? Where do you see that?" Listen carefully again. Poll those who know you well. They are oftentimes are best measures of what our real strengths are, but there are some other ways that we can also self identify our areas of strength and one of those is to look backward, to look back at our past successes. We can do that over our metaphorical shoulder and just say, "Okay, in life, we've all had struggles and I know I've got strengths and weaknesses. I'm not clear on what some of the strengths are. I'm often painfully aware what the weaknesses are.

Let me look back at my successes, personal and professional, it doesn't matter what the setting. It could be ministerial, it could be corporate, it could be organizing your home, it could be getting through your college degree or raising your kids or whatever. Look back at areas, in all areas of life where you've had pretty indisputable success. Anybody would say, "Yeah. That was well done. Good job. Nice result there," and then ask yourself, "How did I do that? What did I bring to that situation? Do I have an A game? By golly, I must have an A game. Yeah, I know what I brought to it," and then you begin to see threads. I brought the same kind of skills and strengths to this situation. Hmm, it wasn't a particularly similar situation but the results and the things that I brought were similar. So you start, again, through hindsight which as they say is 20/20 vision.

## PROFESSIONAL CHRISTIAN COACHING TODAY

---

You start seeing more clearly that strengths that you may have been playing to much more naturally, just kind of automatically but didn't consciously realize it at that time and so you don't have the advantage of being able to do that consciously now. Go back and pick up that information, that self awareness so you can bring it into your present life.

Kim, I have a specific example of that in my own life. I was apparently shipped from the factory by God with some software loaded that my parents didn't have any idea was in there. It was this really out of the box entrepreneurial bent in me. My folks were focused on kind of the traditional model of education and employee. In other words, working for someone else, not being the employer yourself or certainly not just going out and kind of creating your own thing all by yourself. So this entrepreneurial piece of me that did come loaded in my software package but didn't have an instruction manual so they didn't know it was there. They didn't know I was called forth, I didn't know it was there. I struggled, Kim, with school all the way through. I didn't hate school but I didn't like school. I didn't do great at school. I was like a B student and it wasn't uncommon for me to get a C and sometimes D but I was kind of like mediocre and that is not what I see now in my adult life over the last 30 years or so looking back at my areas of greatest success. When it comes to business, I have really, forgive the sounding of pride here but I have shined in areas of entrepreneurship, out of the box creativity. That's very different from areas where I had great responsibility as somebody else's employee or I did decent enough performance as somebody's student, very, very different sense of just playing to my strengths, finding my sweet spot when I'm in an entrepreneurial mode. I only saw that increasingly through the years as I kept looking back over my metaphorical shoulder and realizing, "Wow, that was different. That was cool. What did I do there that was so different from kind of the zone I normally operate in?"

## PROFESSIONAL CHRISTIAN COACHING TODAY

---

KIM: That's a great example. It's a great example of a couple of things. One is that other people maybe know our strengths better than we do because anybody who knows you, Chris, we're like, "Yeah, entrepreneurial."

CHRIS: Duh!

KIM: That probably wasn't a secret to us, at least like you said in hindsight but what a great thing, exercise to do with our clients. So look back over your life. What are your top five peak moments? Times when something you've put your hand to or your mind to has really shone and then how did you make that happen or how would that have been different if you weren't there? So they can see the unique contribution that they brought and that just seems like that would be such a valuable and uplifting coaching session for a client.

CHRIS: One oftentimes I'm sure you found, Kim, in your coaching and I certainly do that about all it takes, all it requires of the coach is the awareness that you need to prompt it. As you said just a moment ago, we're not typically just consciously automatically aware of our strengths, and so being prompted by a coach to look backward at our successes, which like I just said carefully a moment ago there, I don't want to sound prideful, that's our first check. No, I don't want to be prideful. I don't want to gloat over my success. Whoa, wait a minute, totally different sphere here. We're not. We're looking back at indisputable success and saying how did you play a key role in making that happen? What were the strengths you brought so you can get that information? A coach encouraging a client toward that kind of self exploration is doing the client a tremendous favor and a lot of gold is likely to be mined out of that kind of retrospective examination and journaling and such.

Another key here that we can do as coaches and of course doing in our own lives and looking at trying to be more strengths based in our own living is to follow our energy. I don't want to sound too new agey there but the reality is, sometimes when we're doing certain things, we are just in that sweet spot of playing to our

## PROFESSIONAL CHRISTIAN COACHING TODAY

---

strengths and we are so energized by it that you're not looking for energy from the universe or something, you're saying, Whoa, there it is. There is the zone. I just hit that and time flew. I lost all track of time and look at the results that came from it and look at how much fun I was having. Kim, the example you gave a moment ago of having served in a supposedly higher responsibility area within an organization but it was in your areas of strength and it was fun and it produced great results because you said, "Ah, I've got to back off my time here so I will a supposedly much lower level of responsibility. It's in my areas of weakness. It took probably twice as much time and no energy for you, it was deenergizing for you. It sucked the life out of you probably.

KIM: Yeah exactly.

CHRIS: What were you thinking, right? Todd Kashdan is a psychologist. He is a psychology professor at George Mason University. He is an author of a book called Curious. In it he has a quote that probably pertains to us here. He says, "You can see someone feels alive and motivated when they are using a core strength." So that's really all we're encouraging us to do here as coaches and with our clients in our coaching of them is to notice purposely, consciously when there is excitement, when you feel alive, when the client says "Oh, I was so fulfilled in that moment." When the rapidity of their speech picks up, they begin to talk faster and like I said, when they lose track of time, when time is just flying by for you. I bet you, there are some key strengths you could identify that you are living in in those moments. Be sure you do identify them and begin to try to play to them much more consciously throughout your life. You'll get huge results.

KIM: I don't know about you but when I point that out to my clients, sometimes in the sessions like, "Wow, you just lit up when you talked about that" or "Did you hear your excitement as you said that?" The most frequent response I get is, "Oh, did I? You know, I guess I did!" It seems so obvious just to point out that passion or lack of passion or enthusiasm in their voice, assuming they hear it but they really haven't heard themselves and didn't notice it until we call it forth in them and call

# PROFESSIONAL CHRISTIAN COACHING TODAY

---

it out. It's just a precious gift for them to have someone point out, "Hey, look what happened when you talked about that subject or that particular event?" I think it's something really valuable we add to the coaching conversation.

CHRIS: It's a great example of that powerful listening that we always emphasize and then reflecting back and that simple statement, "Wow, lot of energy around that," just stating what to us was screamingly obvious but as you say, they may not have even noticed how much more energized they were as they were talking. So invite them to explore, "Yeah, what's that energy about?" Probably it's about strengths.

KIM: Yeah, it's a fun conversation to have. All right, so we have you or your client can ask your colleagues and friends what your strengths might be. The second one is just do retrospective. Look back over the successful moments in your life, your client's life and see what some of those common denominators might be. The third one is just follow their energy and the coaching conversation. You'll hear it in every single coaching conversation. Some things light us up and some things drag us down. The fourth one, and notice it's fourth because we don't always have to jump right to it is we can if our clients would benefit and are interested, encourage them to take a formal strengths assessment, something like the Strengths Finder, which is what Gallup Organization put out which is very helpful and very inexpensive. There's also the VIA Character Strengths test but different formal ways for clients to sit down, answer some questions, and get some answers.

I have a really neat experience that I think I'll always treasure with one of my clients. Let's call her Michelle. She came into coaching with me and she was just pretty much discouraged with all sorts of things in her life. I don't remember what precipitated it but one of the things that she decided she was going to do was take the Strengths Finder, come back, and bring what she discovered to the coaching session. When she did, she teared up and she started crying and she said, "Kim, it's not that I didn't know my strengths, it's that I didn't remember that I had any." She had been in wrong positions, playing to her weaknesses for

# PROFESSIONAL CHRISTIAN COACHING TODAY

---

so long and it became her reality and she thought that that's just who she was – someone who wasn't very good at anything. What a transformational moment that was to see on print, on paper this assessment saying, “Look at you. Here's where you shine.”

CHRIS: Wow! That sounds like me back in school or as persons employees just figuring, “Well, I guess I must be kind of smart but not nearly as smart as others because I always wind up in kind of the ABC category but mostly in the B area, you know, good enough you passed, great. Sure, I'm not very fired up about this and the same one I was being employed by others. It would be relatively easy at any point during my various entrepreneurial struggles over these 30 years to start businesses to instead go out and just interview somewhere and get hired. Sure, I can get hired at any number of different places and find myself in that same kind of a B string place and that's what that person was saying. I forgot that I even had them because for so long, I've just been doing things that didn't play to them and it does create a different narrative in our minds about ourselves.

Back to that verse that I mentioned at the very beginning of today's podcast, Romans 12:6, “In His grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well.” There are places in which we will really shine as His created beings, created in His image so we're imaging Him to the world. Those are the ones we want to identify and those are the ones that we want to live in to. I think just riffing off of that and transitioning then into strengths based living, we're really saying there are only two primary things that any of us need to do, us or our clients, in order to be more strengths based focused in our living, in our coaching. Let us first to discover what your strengths are and work in those strengths more and then secondly to delegate, to hire out, to at least downsize the number of things that require you to play instead into your weaknesses. Now we're never going to be able to live life not having to do certain things that are in our areas of weakness. In fact, it would be wrong as Christians for us to even encourage such a thing.

# PROFESSIONAL CHRISTIAN COACHING TODAY

---

We know in fact that our Scriptures say that in our weakness, God's strength is proven, but it is weakness for us and so what we're saying in general is that if you want to live to your fullest and best most times, your default needs to be identifying the strengths and playing to those strengths, and then identifying the weaknesses and looking instead of just dodging them to delegating them, to having the important conversation with your boss and say, "These are not my areas of strength. Are you sure you sure we want me to keep using me here or would we be better served as an organization to have somebody off load some this stuff to someone who is better in that area and put me more into whatever else." There are things that we can do with our weaknesses that will free up more time to focus like Steve Jobs encouraged in our areas of greatest strength where we're going to see that exponential payoff.

KIM: It reminds me of a client I worked with one time. I'll call him Paul. Paul had worked in broadcasting and he was on air talent. He kind of have that radio voice you have, Chris, and so he was on air talent for a broadcast company. He was in his area of strength. He really liked to communicate, liked to be with people. He was a creative person. It was just fun and he was good so good at his job he got promoted. Well, you can probably see where this is going. He became management and it was budgeting, it was meetings, and a lot of isolation and authority type positions and not creativity but boxy things. He stayed in that position and didn't realize, really have an understanding why all of a sudden, he didn't like his job. He didn't want to go to work anymore. When we discussed these areas of strength and he became aware of, "This is what has happened. This is why I no longer like my job." He sat down, had a conversation with his boss, and took a voluntary demotion so that he could go back to being on air talent because it was that important to him to love his life, to be in an area where he was strong even if it meant maybe not as much prestige and not as much money. He wanted to be good at what he did because that's where he thrived. Those conversations can take place and amazing things can happen.

# PROFESSIONAL CHRISTIAN COACHING TODAY

---

CHRIS: They really can. One of greatest examples of why so many companies now are hiring in to work with all of their executive leadership, in fact, ministries are increasingly doing this as well. They are hiring in coaches because of this very thing. All of us are familiar with Jim Collin's book, Good to Great and in it how he emphasizes it is important to get the right people on the bus, the bus being the organization, the movement, or the ministry or whatever, but then emphasizing that once they are on the bus, you got to get the right people on the bus in the right seats, in the right roles, the right capacities. Industry is notorious for promoting good performers to their particular places of personal incompetence. You move up the food chain, so to speak, in what sounds like a more prestigious corner office or higher pay kind of a position and it can be right outside of your strengths.

The very things that help you succeed so well back there will be your undoing here and will deflate you and will hurt the industry. Coaches stepping into that kind of environment can help that whole culture examine more, "Hey, you got some great people on the bus now. Are they in the right seats? Can we keep those folks in the right seats and the right places where their strengths can really shine? Can we avoid what, again there's a term for this in industry called the Peter Principle, the process of being promoted to your place of personal incompetence. Can we avoid that by just helping everybody on the team be aware of what everybody on the team's strengths are and ensure that what we're trying to build systemically plays to all those different strengths. It's a game changer in industry, in ministry, in anything we do.

KIM: It's very costly, costly in terms of the organization and the people's lives when we allow people to just slog along in those areas of no passion, total mediocrity versus playing to their strengths. It goes back a little bit to what you were saying earlier with Steve Jobs. The enemy of the best is often the good, not the bad, but the good and so it's up to us to learn personally and to encourage our clients to

# PROFESSIONAL CHRISTIAN COACHING TODAY

---

say no to good things so they really can give a wholehearted yes to the very best things.

CHRIS: Absolutely. It's as good a place as any to wrap things up here. It reminds me of a chapter of a book that I wrote years ago called Coaching the Coach. My chapter was called Growing Your Business, that would be your coaching practice, Growing Your Business by Doing Less. That's exactly what I was focusing on. Delegating out those other things so that what you choose to say yes to really does tremendously grow your business. It's a principle that holds true across all of life.

KIM: And so we promised you that we were going to leave you with a call to action so you could step more boldly into your areas of strength. Our encouragement is for you to identify your own personal and focus on one of your strengths. Just really call it out, focus on leaning into that strength in the upcoming week. I would love it and I know you would too, Chris, if you would stop by our Facebook page at Professional Christian Coaching Today and tell us what happened as a result of this experiment.

CHRIS: Yeah indeed. In fact, be sure to visit our website as well when you're letting us know what you're doing. Go out there and be aware that we have copies of the entire transcript of this episode today but all of our episodes, any episode that you have ever listened to. If there were certain key nuggets that you wanted to grab out of there, those are available to you completely free. The full transcript is available on our website at [ProfessionalChristianCoachingToday.com](http://ProfessionalChristianCoachingToday.com). While you're out there, also if you're a coach, remember to be sure and avail yourself of your free listing on the Christian coach search engine there. Again, that's on our website at [ProfessionalChristianCoachingToday.com](http://ProfessionalChristianCoachingToday.com). Until next time. Keep raising the standard of coaching and changing the world.

KIM: God's richest blessings to you.

# PROFESSIONAL CHRISTIAN COACHING TODAY

---