



Conscious Software Development Telesummit

Conscious Leadership

Speakers:



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Michael Smith: And I'm here today with Christopher Avery and we have an interesting question for you which does your team take responsibility for all it's tasks or are you always chasing them to take responsibility and is there something you don't know you don't know about how you contribute to that vicious cycle?

So before we get into that let me just introduce you to Christopher. He has been an outspoken celebrated successful adviser to executives on the issue of personal and shared responsibility in their teams and also leadership, teamwork, change, cultural performance.

He and his company Partnerwerks... Interesting Chris, Partnerwerks is spelled with an E and not an O. Is that a typo or am I missing something there?

Christopher A.: No. It's a German word that means people working productively together Michael.

Michael Smith: Oh.

Christopher A.: So it's just Partnerwerks like "Partnervorks".

Michael Smith: Ah. Very good mein herr. Yes. So Partnerwerks and Christopher helps contribute to very productive teams, engaged happy leaders for organizations like Cisco, Erickson, Rally Software Sales Force, Skype and The Gap. That's an impressive list and also Chris a while back wrote a book Teamwork Is An Individual Skill and he's done a lot of work on change and leadership and also he's been a visionary force behind the Leadership Gift Program and a mentor for the growth of community of leaders in that program.

So welcome Chris.

Christopher A.: Thank you very much Michael. My friends call me Christopher.

Michael Smith: Hey. I apologize for that. Christopher.

Christopher A.: It's all right. Yes sir.

Michael Smith: You mentioned in the topic description in the show notes, you said to everyone about conscious leadership. What does that mean to you?

Christopher A.: Conscious leadership to me generally means being awake and aware, present. We could get in to that. I'm sure you know but many people

realize that our minds emotionally travel all the time to the past and the future and often we're not present and in the now. It means to be thinking win/win/win/win instead of win/lose. It means to be coming from opportunity in abundance as opposed from coming from scarcity, fear, loss and maybe just basically it means that business is an agent for social good and world benefit and it's good business to be good, bright, present, responsible people.

That's basically what conscious leadership means to me. You say consciousness to you is awareness plus choice. I love that. I think most people lack awareness of all the choices available to them so fear and scarcity constrains our perceptions and our ability to see what's available. So what would you add about what conscious leadership is?

Michael Smith: Well, I think that's a great summery Christopher and yeah, I would say awareness of our situation, what is actually true in our business, in our team and awareness, like you said of all the different options that might be available. It's very hard when we don't know what we don't know because there's not a lot you can do about it if you're not even aware that you don't know something. At least if I know what I don't know, I can then investigate, learn about it, consider it as an option and you know I think one of the keys to successful leadership is being conscious of ourselves and our team and begin aware of all those different things.

Christopher A.: Yeah,

Michael Smith: The other thing I would add on to that, I think in software development in particular there's a tendency for people to be hired who are very good at logical, left-brain thinking and it leaves the whole right brain intuitive side of things a little hidden so there are some opportunities there too.

Christopher A.: And we'll get into a related concept, I've learned that because we've all grown up in a world of learning right and wrong and good and bad, we have been taught to be very evaluative and even judgmental. And what I've learned is that every upset is an opportunity to learn. Everything in our perceptual field, everything in our life, everything in our work that takes us off is a sign that something inside of us that we're not clear about. That we don't understand well enough. That we haven't got enough awareness or consciousness of. We haven't integrated with our reality enough to be able to handle that so its not only the left, right brain stuff but it's also the getting off of the judgement and evaluation to start to see things clearly that will build huge awareness and that's the tool that we're going to talk about today.

Michael Smith: Well that is great and I invite any of our listeners that are feeling ticked off about this subject to consider that possibly it's some great opportunity to learn here and just for half an hour what if we turned off that judgement filter that we all have and just have the kind of thing we see in young children, they're just so excited to learn about something and be open to seeing something new.

Then turn back the judgement filter on later and say, "Okay is this something I could use in my business, in my team, in my software projects.

Christopher A.: Absolutely. And if I may say, if you have not been introduced to my work in the responsibility process before you're probably going to find this time very well spent so give it another five minutes.

Michael Smith: So now we've kind of said what we see conscious leadership as, are there some benefits and drawbacks to this approach?

Christopher A.: Michael our sound broke up for just a second. Would you restate that

Michael Smith: So now we have an idea of what conscious leadership means, why would someone want to do this? What are the benefits of it? What are the risks and drawbacks of conscious leadership?

Christopher A.: Well, to answer your question, probably best to compare it to a recent book by John Mackey, the chairman of whole foods about conscious capitalism and what he says is that before capitalism lost it's good name, all capitalism was conscious capitalism. There wasn't the conscious label needed and what he meant by that was because business people used to operate in a confined ecosystem where if they screwed their customers or their employees the business wouldn't work, then they tended to work in a very win/win/win abundant fashion seeing not only the investors of their business as the most important stakeholders but seeing multiple equally important stakeholders either thriving together or going down together and he said...

Then we learned about crony capitalism and you know, the very greedy winner take all side of business and so now we need two words. We need conscious and crony and I think it's the same about conscious leadership and crony leadership. I've written at length about how just because someone is a leader doesn't make them a very authentic, conscious, people-valuing person. So the benefit of practicing conscious leadership is creating more wins for more people and the business. There's lots of statistics that are showing when business people take the view that they

can't separate from their environment, they can't separate from their employees, they can't separate from their supply network, they can't put their investors ahead of their customers. When they see all of those stakeholders as important, then the business tends to be more resilient and more profitable than if they were always trying to go for broke.

Michael Smith: Well, that makes sense to me. I mean, that's saying that we naturally humans work in a community where we know the stakeholders and if you had a business in a village where one person invested and someone else did the work and you were managing it, you know everyone would know everyone and we all know transparently to a greater extent what was going on.

Christopher A.: Absolutely. And the world is becoming more and more transparent so you know, again, now it's harder to get away with taking advantage of everybody in order to earn a paycheck.

Michael Smith: Yeah. Well, it's just... I don't know about you but for me if I take advantage of someone and I do stuff that's immoral I kind of feel icky inside and I might have put some money in the bank of money but I got a negative balance in my own stomach.

Christopher A.: What I want to say about you just said is that so many business people, so many of my clients, so many executives I've worked with over the years, they feel that way in their personal life but somehow they've learned to turn those filters off when they go to work because it's a jungle in that company and it's dog eat dog and it's slay or be slayed and maybe conscious leadership means figuring out how to not turn that filter off when you go to work.

Maybe it's keep that filter on. Be the same person whether you're at home or at work and if you're in an environment that's asking you to be unconscious to actually cut your caring, feeling part off from doing the business then maybe you're in the wrong place.

Michael Smith: Well, and I think that's where a lot of people end up after doing that for ten, twenty, forty years. Part of them inside has died by becoming unconscious.

Christopher A.: Absolutely.

Michael Smith: That's where a lot of burn out occurs in teams or leaders. So I don't know quite what the opposite of burn out is but I guess one of the benefits of

this would be people being more engaged in their tasks as well as their responsibilities.

Christopher A.: Sure. Engaged, enthusiasm, passionate, interested. A lot of people don't understand what burnout is. Burnout is not from hard work. Burnout is from hard work with low reward.

Michael Smith: [inaudible 00:12:10]

Christopher A.: Yeah. Or low satisfaction. Call it hard work with low satisfaction. So if you're slaving away because you need to keep paying the mortgage and the club membership and the car payments and everything else but you hate your job and you don't align with the values of the company then yeah, that's a recipe for burnout.

Michael Smith: Hmm.

Christopher A.: And I know people who work hard with great satisfaction and actually the greater the satisfaction, the more they're interested in working because they know they're solving social problems, they know they're creating extraordinary value for people, they're building great communities of teams. It's very satisfying.

Michael Smith: I think we've seen that in different software projects. There are projects where there seems to be an arbitrary deadline and the software isn't being used by the users anyway and yet there's a lot of pressure to meet the deadline and people burn out on the team versus perhaps some open source project where people work equally long hours and yet remain engaged because they see the value of what they're doing and they feel their contribution is valued.

Christopher A.: Absolutely or a more transparent agile approach where people are working iteratively and incrementally and constantly demoing this week's features to interested stakeholders and getting feedback and the whole ecosystem is involved in seeing this thing evolve and grow. It's not being done behind a black wall that's supposed to be turned on next October at three o'clock. Yeah. There's lots of examples of thriving teams and groups enjoying their work.

Michael Smith: So we talked about a lot of benefits of conscious leadership. Are there any drawbacks to this approach?

Christopher A.: Well, I think that you've already alluded to the drawbacks. The drawbacks are you have to be willing to have feelings. You have to be willing to tap

into a deeper sense of purpose that you probably have and may not have been allowing to come out because you don't think that you could actually be on purpose and make a living and enjoy it. So if you want to call it a downside, the downside is that...

Here's the downside, if it's a move you want to make, the downside may be that there's a learning curve and there's some fear of making the change from being unconscious and turning off your inspiration to deciding to turn it on, discover who you are, what you really want to stand for in business and find that.

You know, it may come to you just like that. You may be able to make a left turn in your career your life and your work and it may take a little while and that's the scary part that stops some people. The good news is you can do it incrementally.

Michael Smith: Great. Do you think that conscious leaders are born or made?

Christopher A.: I felt this a long time ago from myself. Leadership Michael, in my mind is stepping up to a problem or opportunity space and feeling an emotional connection and a sense of ownership for that space and then mobilizing resources around you and I don't mean all leaders do that. I mean, when you see true leadership that's being done so leaders make themselves by discovering their passion and a feeling of ownership for a certain opportunity and situation or a problem space or a market space and just going after it and when they do that in an aware or a conscious manner, they shouldn't be surprised to look around and see lots of people wanting to follow them.

Michael Smith: It just occurs to me that if someone's not sure if they're capable of being a conscious leader it may be they already are in a different area of their life. Perhaps in their family they provide conscious leadership or perhaps in a sports team or their school in some other area.

Christopher A.: Yeah. To me, leadership is when you have passion to pursue a certain area, you feel a sense of ownership to make this thing happen to solve a world problem or solve a world mess, there are...

A great quote came out of a management innovating meeting a couple of years ago in [inaudible 00:17:31] Switzerland. The quote was, "There are no more problems in the world to solve, only messes." So where I grew up being told if I can go find a big problem to solve, I'll have a career for the rest of my life. I now tell my merely adult sons, go find a big mess that needs solving and you'll have a career for the rest of your life. If someone

feels a real sense of ownership and passion for that the way you do about conscious development or the way I do about the responsibility process then work turns into play and the leadership is a byproduct because you realize you can't do it alone so you have to figure out a way to invite other people to come help you get this done.

Michael Smith: That's almost a Tom Sawyer moment when he had the fence to paint and then persuaded everyone else to paint the fence with him and they would pay him for the privilege.

Christopher A.: No. I think that's a fabulous story but I would call that persuasive leadership rather than conscious leadership. I think a conscious leader would have been painting alongside the others and not taking their money but I guess we can debate that.

Michael Smith: So you mentioned the responsibility process a few times. How's that relate to leadership?

Christopher A.: Over 25 years ago I was trying to figure out what the shared sense of ownership is in teams when teams perform highly. So when all the research on high performance teams say that when teams click, the members of the team are willing to go beyond what they've been asked to do voluntarily.

That means they take on a sense of responsibility that's greater than their accountabilities. They stepped up to a shared ownership. They step up to throwing in together with other people on something that's bigger than their part, bigger than their job.

So I went in search of what is this felt sense of ownership? Where does it come from? Is it just magic? Some people have it and some people don't? Can you turn it on if it's not there? And I found a little research program that was unpacking how personal responsibility works in our minds and we've discovered a process. I joined that program and we've discovered a process in the mind of part of our cognitive processing that regulates how we respond to anxiety, upsets, frustrations, problems in our life and helps us decide whether to take ownership of it, in which case if we do we will learn and grow. And if we don't, then we get to keep that frustration or problem for the rest of our days and all of that work now is called the responsibility process and it's the first actionable how-to approach for understanding, teaching and taking personal responsibility and I spend all of my time bringing it to the attention of the world and helping individuals, teams and corporations that want to practice it to master it to do so.

Michael Smith: How does that help improve someone's consciousness in their leadership?

Christopher A.: Remember when I said that if you have something that upsets you, that's a sign that there's something about how you integrate with your world that could be changed so that that thing would not upset you any more so that you would actually have more freedom, more powerful, more choice about that situation.

The way the responsibility process helps is that I know that every upset is an opportunity for me to learn and every time I learn, I increase my ability to function as a human being and to handle more and more and more stuff around me with ease.

One definition of a leader is someone who can stand in the middle of the drama and the chaos of lots of people losing their heads and remain centered, remain present and see things clearly. Will practicing responsibility mastering your own responsibility process will incrementally help you get to that place where you will be clearer and clear and clearer and more center and more centered and more free and more powerful all the time.

That's only going to make you more creative, more innovative, more adaptable, increase your flexibility, increase your survive-ability, increase your agility, increase your ability to change. There are no downsides to it.

Michael Smith: Can you tell us a little bit about it for someone who's dying to learn about the responsibility process? What would some of the things you do with them be?

Christopher A.: Absolutely so the easiest thing to do would be to jot down a stack of seven words and hold these seven words in your head and the words start at the bottom and the first word is lay blame. Actually it's two words. Lay blame. The word about that is justify, the word above that is shame, the word above that is obligation. Then draw a line across above obligation and above that is the word responsibility and then out to the right of shame and obligation, write the word quit.

This is the responsibility process and what it says is this is a mechanism that's very active in your mind and the mind of everybody we know and in our communication that every time something goes wrong the least little bit, you can't find your car keys or someone didn't show up at a meeting you were depending on or something on the dashboard that was green turns red. When something goes wrong even a little bit, then we

feel some anxiety and that anxiety is actually an internal conflict between what we have and what we want.

If you think of a force and counter-force, there's what we have, what we want. We're in motion, we're people in motion towards goals. So we have what we want. Our strategy, our vision, our task, our objective and then we get stopped from it and that's like a force field in our mind and that causes internal friction or conflict and that's the source of anxiety or upset and when that happens, this process kicks in and you start at the bottom.

So you're an my and everybody we know, our natural first response to something going wrong is to look for somebody to blame so we call that lay blame and we've been told our whole lives we shouldn't do it Michael, but what we haven't been told our whole lives is we only do it because we're human and we're hard wired to do it. It's our first coping mechanism for dealing with being upset and what this research says that lay blame is just a mental state, it's a state of mine. Which means if we can become aware of it, conscious of it, we can realize that we're in this mental state and we can chose to get off of it.

This is true of each of these states that I've mentioned here which means responsibility is just a mental state that's available to us all the time so in each of the states there is a very specific logic. In each of the states below the line, the logic is very simplistic and once you understand it, it looks a little silly, maybe even stupid. So in blame, the logic is that I'm in the position of effect in the cause effect logic and the cause is another person and the premise is for my effect to change that other person must change. Most of us aren't very good at changing other people which means that if the way you account for a problem and yes, there's lots of accountability meetings where we blame and justify other things.

If the way you account for a problem is by seeing that somebody else has to change for your problem to go away, then you are in a very powerless position. A position we know as being a victim. Right?

So justify similar instead now instead of a person, it's a set of circumstances and circumstances are always beyond our control. So it's the weather, it's the traffic, it's the market, it's the economy, it's the government, it's politics, it's whatever it is. We can come up with a million circumstances and say that the circumstance is more powerful than I am to do something about this problem.

Again, when we're in that mental state of justify, we're at effect and the cause is a milieu of situation circumstances and we're all experts. We're really good. It's one of the things that I'm constantly fascinated with this line of research and line of inquiry is that our clients are brilliant, educated, ambitious, smart, intelligent, people and we all get stuck in these mental states all the time where if you could get out of the state, become conscious of it and look back at it, you actually laugh at. Right?

Michael Smith: Right.

Christopher A.: Let me give you a quick example of justify. The number one justify that I get in all of my client relationships is this. That's just the way it is around here. Right? That's the way the culture has always been in this company, that's the way management has always been, that's the way it's always going to be and then we stick the premise that remember the mental state has a cause and effect logic. The premise and justify is it's more powerful than I am. There's nothing you can do about it.

So when we're in this mental state, yes we complain, we talk about the problem, we even talk very righteously about where the problem really is and what needs to be done but we don't solve it so in all these positions below the line, we talk about our problems. Only above the line when we get to responsibility and truly feel a sense of ownership are we willing to learn and grow and see what's true about our reality and figure out how to truly address the problem so we either talk about it or we take ownership and solve it.

Michael Smith: And just so we're clear, these are both states in us as leaders and also they're in our teams as well.

Christopher A.: They're identical in every human being regardless of age, gender, race, educations, status, authority, doesn't matter. It's part of our fundamental DNA of how our coping mechanisms work.

Michael Smith: So part of this learning is learning how to shift this in myself and also it's part how to help shift it in other people.

Christopher A.: That's absolutely true. I'd like to explain shame and obligation, quit and responsibility if we have time but let me say this to your point. Most leaders, what so many leaders don't know and need to know is that if they are accounting for problems in their team, in their company, in their department, in their function by blaming others, by justifying the weather or the economy. By beating themselves up, what we call shame, self-pity or by obligation saying "I'm trapped, I have no choice. I have to."

If they are communicating these coping mechanisms then they're teaching the people who report to them, coping strategies for working in this company. So we tend to think that leaders by their nature are more responsible people than followers. It's not true.

I know plenty of leaders who think that they are responsible and they think they're surrounded by all of these people who don't take responsibility and my question to them is "How did you hire these people, select them, train them and help them in reinforcing this the whole time?" And if you see these people as your problem, then where you are in the responsibility process is not at the top. You are at the bottom.

Michael Smith: That is a deep awareness. To be somewhat uncomfortable and provide a huge growth opportunity.

Christopher A.: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Michael Smith: So we are coming up to time here Christopher and I know we've only just touched the surface of this deep topic. If some of our listeners are interested in improving their responsibility and their teams responsibility, I know you have some gifts that we put in the show notes. Can you tell people about those and what those next steps might be.

Christopher A.: I'm delighted Michael. Thank you. So first of all, we're all responsible people so our society thinks of responsibility as being our character which means that we're good people, we work hard for a living, we take care of our families so everybody on this call is responsible. The responsibility process teaches us a little something different and that is a framework for learning versus coping.

It's a framework for growing versus coping so what I'd recommend to you is that you download a full color PDF copy of this poster and you can get it from ChristopherAvery.com/poster. It's in the show notes and print out a copy for yourself. Put one in your office, put one on your refrigerator, put one on your bathroom mirror and I'm not kidding. It's available in... well, there's twenty two languages on my website now, another three languages will be published soon and people all over the world email me pictures of the responsibility process poster on their refrigerator. I've even seen it hanging on the conference room of the Nokia phones in downtown Beijing. It's really a blast. We've got it in Klingon if you'd like to have a Klingon version. Just download it...

Michael Smith: We don't have many listeners from the Klingon Empire. I'm sure Klingon's develop a lot of software but yeah. We'll work on that.

Christopher A.: Yeah. So I would say download that. It's got all the teaching points on the back, even the parts we didn't get to today about explaining the mental state of shame and obligation and quit which is essentially being checked out, disengaged and I would start there and then if you want to dig deeper, in your show notes there's a couple of other things. There's a special report, a fifty page special report called Building The Executive Leadership Team. This is an update from my 2001 book, Teamwork Is An Individual Skill and this update gives the five step framework that I have taught thousands of leaders and technical professionals around the world to use a very reliable, repeatable framework for building any team any time and then there's a fun email series called The Eight Great Lives of Leadership where I rail against the leading notion that leadership is influence and I suggest there are some other more powerful ways to think about what leadership is as we've talked a little bit about here.

I'd love to share those with anybody interested.

Michael Smith: Well, it's wonderful that you're providing those. It's been a pleasure talking with you Christopher. You've opened up some opportunities for growth and understanding when we're upset, that is an opportunity so I want to thank you for that and I look forward to seeing everyone on the next session of The Conscious Software Development Telesummit.

Christopher A.: Thank you for what you're doing Michael.

Christopher Avery Bio:

Christopher Avery is among the most outspoken, celebrated, and successful advisors to executives on the critical issue of personal and shared responsibility as it affects leadership, teamwork, change, culture and performance.

Through his corporate services firm Partnerwerks Inc., Christopher's strategies contribute to hyper-productive, engaged, and happy leaders, teams, and organizations in companies such as Cisco, Ericsson, Rally Software, Salesforce.com, Skype, and The GAP. Christopher's solutions are especially popular among leaders of product development organizations.

Christopher is the author of the popular book "Teamwork Is An Individual Skill" and hundreds of other commentaries on responsible leadership, teamwork, and change. He is the visionary force behind The Leadership Gift Program and mentor to its global community of leaders. And he's here to share these rich discoveries with you.

Topic and Questions:

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1. What does conscious leadership mean to you?
2. What are the benefits/drawbacks of conscious leadership?
3. Are conscious leaders born or made?
4. Tell me about The Responsibility Process and what it has to do with leadership
5. How does The Responsibility Process increase consciousness, awareness, and choice?

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