



PROFESSIONAL CHRISTIAN COACHING TODAY

Chris McCluskey & Kim Avery

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

Episode 063

De-Stressing the Holidays

with Linda Hedberg, ACC

KIM: Well, we have a timely topic for you here today, de-stressing the holidays. That's right. We are in the middle of the holiday season. Thanksgiving is just past. We are entering the busy, busy Christmas season and for many, it's a glorious time of year. For others, it's a very stressful time of year and there are probably all shades in between. As we look at approaching the holidays, we want to talk to you, the Christian coach, but also to you as a coach because your clients, no doubt, are showing up on the call similar to the way my clients are showing up on the call, a little distracted, a little stressed over all the many things pulling at their attention. We did bring in a special guest to talk about this topic today. Chris, why don't you go ahead and introduce her?

CHRIS: We do and I'm very excited about our guest today, Linda Hedberg. She is one of the earliest students that trained with the school that I started way back in the beginning. I don't know how many years ago it goes back but way back more than a decade ago that she joined us in the Professional Christian Coaching program. Linda has become a real recognized voice in the Christian coaching community. Many of our listeners will recognize her immediately as the author

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of *The Complete Guide to Christian Coach Training*. That has been produced every year now for several years, evaluating all of the emerging Christian coach training schools and ranking them with regard to several different criteria. She is also the owner of ChristianCoachingResources.com and we'll tell you a little bit more about that at the end. Linda, of course, is an ICF certified coach and she specializes in life as well as leadership work.

During the holidays, one of the primary things that she occupies herself with starting sometime she tells me around October and all the way through the better part of November, tucking over into the beginnings of December is this very topic for today, de-stressing the holidays, trying to help people think through in a proactive manner what are the holidays likely to bring, how do I want the holidays to play out, how can I have more of the blessings of joy and peace and less of the stress that so easily comes. Linda, wonderfully delightful to have you join us here.

LINDA: Thank you. Chris and Kim. I'm excited to be here.

CHRIS: Start us out by saying what sparked your interest in taking a coach approach to de-stressing the holidays? We all get that the holidays are stressful, but you looked at that and said, "Oh, here's an opportunity. Here's something that coaches can really do that would be tremendously valuable." Where is the genesis of that?

LINDA: Well, Chris, as you said years back right when I first started out after taking those initial coach training classes. As a new coach, I observed that people are experiencing a lot of stress during the holidays including my clients. It seemed like people were hoping for a wonderful season. They anticipate really lovely things, very excited about it, and then the holidays arrive. People brace for that rollercoaster and hop on and go for the ride. We grab the calendar and start filling it in with this, that, and the other thing and there is quite the list – school band concerts school choir concert, daycare Christmas party, church concert, church carol sing, women's event at church, spouse's Christmas party, our work party the

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cookie exchange. We go from small groups to the community galas, from family Thanksgiving to family Christmas, this side of the family, that side of the family.

CHRIS: Please, please stop, stop!

LINDA: I want t stop now. Right, I know. We go into survival mode. We're taking action to meet the demands of this including the expectations of those around us and we move along without much more thinking than that, to serve unconsciously on autopilot hoping to survive, and the original goal seems to be to experience more meaning, more of the actual peace and joy that the season promises, and then instead, we start checking things off the list and doing, doing, doing. Doing the best we can and then when all is said and done, we're finished and we're exhausted and in need of recovery.

KIM: And that is an exhausting list, Linda. I remember particularly when my children were small with all those different school things pulling on them, recitals, different instruments, different sports, etc. that they were in, everybody wanted to have a special little Christmas party just for this lovely group of children but it was just one of 6 or 12 or more. I remember one season, it seemed like almost every single evening from Thanksgiving to Christmas was spoken for before I ever put anything that was important to me and for our family on the calendar. Indeed, stress probably is a minimal word to begin to describe what was going on in that season of life. I love that you're helping people take a more intentional approach and not letting the outside world dictate how we have to spend Christmas and the things we do. Talk about some of the things we can do to actually distress this season and get back to that joy, peace, and meaning?

LINDA: Sure. I think what stresses us out is that we really don't take that time to identify what we really want so that we can intentionally move towards what matters the most. Stress is frustration over unmet expectations, hopes, and desires. We want something to be different than it is and we experience stress as we desire that difference.

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Of course for Christ followers, the highlight is Christmas and our celebration of the birth of Christ and the profound meaning and message of joy to the world and peace on earth. I want to challenge people to step back and ask, what does God have for me this holiday season? How do I partner with Him to align with what He has for me? I wanted that for my clients. I wanted that for myself, and so from that, I went ahead and developed the workshops, the guide, the group, and the speaking that I do on the topic.

CHRIS: Yeah and it is really classic coaching kind of material because what you're talking about here is of course vision. But your workshop, your talk, the materials, the tips and pointers that you have, all of that material really seems to start and in some sense actually, find its completion in the terrible importance of having clear vision and then of course operationalizing that vision, trying to figure out what stays and what goes, what do we say yes to so that we also know what has to be said no to. This is really a prayerful state that you're encouraging Christians to enter into as they do the work of vision casting for the holidays coming before the Father. What are kind of some of the questions, the prayers, the petitions that we can bring in a coach approach to the holidays?

LINDA: Yes. Answering the question, God, what do you want for me? Just going to God in prayer and asking meekly what does God want for me? We've already talked about kind of some of the expectations and the things that just happen under the calendar, but uniquely, God has a plan that doesn't necessarily involve that structure, what everybody else wants. So asking God, what do you want from me? With that also, what do I want for myself? That can help us to then identify this ideal vision of how we would like things to be. When we see that vision, we can make plans based on our vision for the holidays and then get rid of the stuff that doesn't fall into it.

Going from there asking, what if it happened ideally? What would that look like? So you take that and write it down, looking at what you've written and then asking yourself, what matters? What matters the most? Who matters the most?

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We then activate our vision by making plans and taking action accordingly to make these things happen as we envisioned. The closer we get to the vision, the less stress we have and we experience more peace and joy.

KIM: That's great, Linda, and it reminds me of how we started this interview that we're having together is this is a coach approach to the holidays. Identify the vision, flesh it out. What is it you want? What are the good parts? What are you looking forward to? What would be disastrous if this thing happened? What is it you want to avoid? I love that it's intentionally checking in with God to see and acknowledge that He has a will for myself and my family during this holiday, shedding other people's expectations, society's expectations, and even those I think unspoken expectations I put on myself that it needs to look like a Pinterest post or it needs to look like everybody's Facebook Christmas looks where people only show the family before the food fight, but then you said something which I think is hot key and is hard for all of us, and that is getting rid of the stuff that doesn't fall into the vision which basically means we're going to have to say no. We're going to have to take away some things because everything will not and should not fit, so talk about that part.

LINDA: Yes and I know we're talking to a lot of coaches on this podcast but everyone of us should be reminded of this including myself and that is when we say yes to something, we're saying no to something else and when we say no to something, we're saying yes to something else. That really works that way every time. If we say our yeses and nos based on prayer and God's leading and not because it has always been done this way. We may need to face fear and be courageous in the process because doing things differently, it may disrupt programs and people that we love, but God gives us the resources to accomplish His purposes and He can give us confidence and courage to move in the directions that He is with us.

These yeses and noes, they can be pretty serious. I had a workshop attendee that decided that she was not going to sing in the church choir this year and the alternative thing that she was going to do instead was helping to plan her firm's

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holiday party. She just felt that as a Christ follower, she needed and wanted to take the opportunity to develop her relationships with her coworkers at the holiday season and Christmas time, and get to know them better, and that actually became more important than singing in the church choir, which was a hard thing to say no to because she was expected. Because of her doing it previously, she had been expected to participate in that.

Another workshop participant decided to say no to elaborate Christmas decorations. She just loves to make Christmas decorations but every time the holidays were over, she was sad that she hadn't made handmade gifts. So she realized, "Wait, that's more important to me. I'm not going to do as elaborate of decorations as I have done in the past and instead this year, I'm going to do handmade gifts. Another workshop participant realized that every year, her family said that they wanted to give to the local youth shelter. Give gifts, bring supplies to the local youth shelter at Christmas time and they just never got it on their calendar and they didn't really have it budgeted. She talked to her family and they made a plan together. They were going to say no to the higher dollar gift budget and instead, they were going to give to the local youth shelter.

The noes can be hard to say but they open up the yeses and they open up the things that God has revealed as what's most important. Following that lead is what can lead then to definitely less stress ultimately and more joy in the process.

KIM: That word "ultimately" is really important and you also mentioned another important word which is "courageous." I think of one client of mine whose relationship with her mother was almost poisonous. It was just really difficult and it didn't affect her family during the year because they didn't leave close to one another, but she was expected each year to take her and her children and her husband to go visit this mother on the holidays and she made a courageous prayerful decision one year that she just wasn't going to subject her family to that kind of poison. Well, you have to know that there is a deep peace and joy that comes with protecting your children, but there was also a lot of relational fallout

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in the short term by setting these boundaries with other people. So making this decision God lays on our hearts or our client's hearts with family that involve other people, may indeed take real courage and may stir up a little bit of temporary trouble to buy the long term piece that we're looking for.

LINDA: Absolutely, absolutely. One of my favorite stories from a workshop participant was when she was thinking through for the first time that she could actually really possibly get her family together and they hadn't gotten together as adult children and with the parents, with the grandkids, nieces and nephews and all of that. It just had never occurred to her that it could actually happen and so she began early on because she was at a workshop that started in October and just started to think, "Man, maybe I could really do this," and so she envisioned the idea and she put it forward and she made it happen and it was such a lovely story. Sometimes, just planning ahead and creating this vision and saying, "Hey, what's possible? What could we possibly do?" just can result in great, great blessing.

CHRIS: I love thinking about the holidays anytime somebody talks about it, even when we're talking about things like stress, poisonous parents, and whatever else because the holidays for me are definitely one of the high points of the year every year. I am so much Santa Claus when I'm here with my family, but in the midst of all the excitement and the fun that I enjoy, we have a different kind of stress and that is that we love getting together, my nuclear family here, my family of procreation - Rachel and I and our seven kids now, eight with our son-in-law - and then our extended family because we live on this farm where various members of my extended family all live within eye shot and so we easily and readily get together, but talk about the need for vision there and the need for intentionality and planning because think about it for just a moment.

Most of our listeners, of course, have families that are the typical sized family, maybe two or three children, perhaps four at the most. Seven kids and like I say now our oldest is married, that's eight, but there's only more coming down the road soon. We're in that empty nesting season. If every person in just our

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nuclear family, just Rachel and I and those eight kids, if every person got each other person one gift, that's nine gifts per person times 10 people. That's 90 gifts and you know that Rachel and I tend to get more than one gift for the kids. In other words, we've got a Christmas tree every year that is just overflowing with gifts. That's money, that's planning time, that's wrapping. That's balancing out how much is spent on this one versus that one. Did we really get something that this one is going to love as much as that one is going to love? Yes, it's fun but it's also stress kind of things that go in those decisions, but now then because we live here on the farm and all the different families have their Christmas mornings together, we all then get together a week later on New Year's eve and we actually do the big extended family Christmas then.

Okay, when we first started out, all of the families moving here, that was about 20 or so people. It is now over 35 and growing, and we could just see with more of these marriages coming, we keep getting, this is only right here among the extended family but the amount of just ridiculous, gee everybody wants to get everybody else a gift. No. That is not going to happen. Having to say no to some things that are so wonderfully fun as gift giving, gift buying, or gift making that's a different kind of a thing that you can say is wonderfully good and yet also requires vision. I just tossed that in there for any others maybe who have the challenge that I find which is I'm not having to say no to poisonous situations and toxic relationships. It's all the good. It's so much wonderful good that as Steven Covey so frequently says, the enemy of the best is most often the good. I don't know. I'll kind of put that out there, but Linda, by the time this interview that we're having here airs, the Christmas holiday is going to be right upon us. I think this will air on about the 13th or so and so Christmas is going to be less than two weeks away. There's not going to feel for our listeners or for their clients like there's a lot of time to do vision casting, work, planning, and all right now. When the holidays are upon us, what are you able to say then in terms of still taking as proactive an approach as possible to the holidays?

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LINDA: Yes, it's past Thanksgiving and it's more of December, and Christmas is almost here, you haven't done the vision casting, I still encourage people to consider the same approach really which is to identify what is most important. It's kind of a mini process of vision casting so at the point where we're past the opportunity to take a lot of involved planning time and vision casting, what we can do to distress is take a moment, and then identify what's the most important in that moment. What matters most? Again, going to God in prayer and saying, "God what do you want for me? What do you want for my family? What do you want for us in this event, in this day, or even this hour?" Focus on that and then let the rest go.

If you need to grieve because we've already talked about the needing to grieve sometimes to let things go, asking for God's grace in that moment and for his help to do that and then step into activating the vision that you identified for that moment.

KIM: I can see that as our clients come and say, "I'm anticipating a family vacation. I'm anticipating having to host all of these people. I'm anticipating being in charge of and just stepping back and asking those visioning questions - what will make that a huge win? What's most important to you in that situation? What will that look like when it goes really well and then backing up and bridging the gap? What can you do to help lead to that outcome? - and then of course reminding them or reminding ourselves that we can't do everything. We're not God and so just letting the rest go. Like you said, pause, let it roll. If God's will for me is to do A, then clearly His will isn't for me to be over there doing B. So it's okay. It's okay if I do A and do it well. Those are wonderful hints. I know you had a couple other quick tips you wanted to leave our listeners before we finished up today, Linda.

LINDA: Well, I know that one of the biggest stressors during the holidays is often founded in relationships. I just want to encourage people that again, use vision to help minimize relational stress. A lot of times, we have conflicting expectations and there's a lack of communication around, "Hey, here's what I really want. Here's

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what matters to me most,” and we don’t have the conversation and we say, “Hey, what matters to you the most? What would you like to see happen here?” So if we leave things unsaid, it’s just going to multiply the stress. My encouragement is to share your vision and then ask questions to learn the vision of others that you are coordinating events with or experiencing the holidays with.

There was a woman in one of the workshops that talked about how she had an experience of being so stressed out because she didn’t have all of the cookies made that were supposed to go on the Santa plate the night before Christmas so that Santa could have all these special cookies that she had been making on an annual basis since the children were very young. She was experiencing the stress over this and finally, she decided to talk to her children and saying, “I’m having a hard time getting all those cookies made.” Of course, it was helpful because they said, “You know what mom, it’s really okay. We really don’t need you to make those cookies and there are some things that are more important to us than those cookies right now,” and they were able to have that kind of discussion.

Another example of sharing vision that I thought was so fun, one of the women who had gone through my workbook went ahead and had a daytrip in the car with her husband and sat and read her vision. At various points, it’s like, “Here’s what I want to see happen.” In particular, we apparently had talked about decorations and the lights on the house, and she wanted to get back to me to say, “You know what, all I had to do was tell him that this is what I wanted to see happen and this was most important to me.” She said, “I couldn’t believe how fast the lights got up on the house and he said to me, “I didn’t know that this was so important to you and no problem. I’m happy to put the lights up on the house.” Just an encouragement especially in those times that relational stress is out there and really difficult, to go ahead and consider sharing and speaking out and saying, “Hey, here’s my vision. Here’s what I’d like to see happen,” and then having that conversation with the people that you’re going to be spending the time with and seeing what overlaps, seeing where you can make that vision happen, so each person involved to the best of everyone’s ability.

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CHRIS: Linda, that's so good, just golden tips there. At one level, I mean, how simple for us to say we need to pause, we need to come before the Lord in prayer, we need to receive from Him vision for what the holidays can be. We need to listen to our own heart and desires, stress levels, health, inabilities, time limitations, and all and cast vision. We then need to operationalize it and plan out and then we need to use the mouth God gave us to have those conversations to just say here's what I'm seeing. What are you seeing? Here's what I'd like. What do you think in reflecting on what I just shared there a moment ago about our families here on the farm. It didn't take very long of us families gathering together after having done Christmas with our own nuclear families the week before. When we all gather, we realize, "Man, we can't be doing gifts for everybody here. There's no need. It's ridiculous. It would just be outrageous showering of gifts that are unnecessary but it's also just adding to the stress.

With one conversation got to the point where instead of having to buy 34 gifts for the other people that are there, each person draws a name and you make one gift each year, and that person happens to be your own prayer partner too. You pray for that person throughout the year. Now, we look forward and come together with something that is far less stressful and far richer in terms of connection and building of relationship because it has been bathed in prayer for a person and it has had that special touch of an individually made gift and you didn't have all the weight of all those other gifts that were supposed to be done because that's the way we've always done it before. Just so good, Linda, to remind us of the things we need to think through and the conversations that we need to have.

Listen, for those of you who are finding your own stress in the holidays, working with clients who are feeling the stress of the holidays, or if you simply resonate with Linda's sweet spirit and realize you'd like to connect with her personally, you can find her out on the web at ChristianCoachingResources.com. You'll find lots of tips and pointers out there, the guidebook that she uses for her workshop that she provides each year on de-stressing the holidays. There's an MP3 recording there that goes with that on the workshop itself and again that

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guidebook there, but you can just contact Linda directly. Again, that's at ChristianCoachingResources.com.

KIM: For those of you who would like to launch 2017 with training to become a professional life coach or a professional leadership coach, don't forget that we have classes starting in January and right now, we are running a Christmas special for those who register before December 17th where upon registration, you get to choose one of two great gifts. One is an Apple watch. The other is a 32 GB Ipad Mini either of which you can use yourself or put on the tree. Make sure you go to ProfessionalChristianCoaching.com to check out that special offer.

CHRIS: And that is a pretty tremendous offer. I think I would have a hard time not having those gifts go to myself, but in the spirit of giving, we can give those to others or you can use them yourself as Kim said there. That special promo though is only good through December 17th. That way, we can make sure they get shipped to you before Christmas. If you're listening to this, check your calendar real quickly. That's probably right around the corner there.

Linda, thanks so much for joining us here and for sharing from your heart and your experiences and helping us to all take a pause and think about the holidays that are right upon us here.

LINDA: Well, it's great to be with you, Kim and Chris.

CHRIS: Gang, Merry Christmas to all of you listening. Until next week. You know the mantra, keep raising the standard of coaching and changing the world.

KIM: God's richest blessings to you.