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## Could You Be a Conscious Company and What Does That Mean?

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Panelists:

Alan Wallner, President and Visionary, Conscious Branding

Chelsey Paulson, COO, Keystone Group International

David Craig Utts, Executive Coach and Advisor

### **Alan Wallner (00:14):**

Hello everyone and welcome to Thrive!cast. I am Alan Wallner the president and visionary of Conscious Branding. With Thrive!cast, our intention is to focus on you, your business and your success. With each episode we discuss at a high level topics to spark new thoughts and to generate ideas and to push the boundaries of what we know is familiar. And hopefully we may even frame up a new mindset, ignite your business forward and inspire action. There's been a lot of things shifting around out there in this business climate. And you may have heard the term "conscious company" popping up here and there over the last year or so. But maybe you're not sure what that means, or even if you should care. Well, today we're going to take a look at what it means to be a conscious company and why you may want to create a conscious company or a conscious brand or conscious culture.

(01:10): We'll talk about what that means and what's involved in being a conscious company and why earning lots of money as a conscious company is a really, really good thing. But before we get started today, I'd like to welcome our panelists Chelsey Paulson, the COO at Keystone Group International, and at Keystone Chelsey works as a strategic partner to the executive teams to mold and grow the culture, focusing on strategic people initiatives that align with the organization's business initiatives. It's a very fast growing company. There is a lot of action. Chelsey is using the Entrepreneurial Operating System, she is an EOS implementer, and she helps businesses develop a culture and a people strategy and aligning the right people in the right seats within the optimal organizational structure.

(02:08): We have a David Craig Utts, an executive coach and adviser. David guides his clients to apply proven principles of conscious leadership while honoring their unique expression as a leader. Which is really important. You don't want to lose your unique characteristics, and David leads companies into discovering a more conscious approach to culture teams and organizational development, and he does this to help support their impact as a conscious company.

So why would someone want to become a conscious company or why would someone want to have a conscious company when business people operate with a low level of consciousness? If they function with the low level of consciousness around their purpose and impact in their business, they engage in what I would term as a trade-off thinking that creates potentially harmful unintended consequences. Such businesses view their purpose as a profit maximization and treat all participants in the system as a means to an end.

(03:38): And this creates a material prosperity in terms of the short term, but in the long term can create systematic problems. If you want to, close your eyes and just imagine a business

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that is created with a dream about how the world could be. The founders are out to create something of relevance, resonance and permanence, a business that will outlive them and deliver real value in multiple ways to everyone it interacts with; a business that parents, children and families will be proud of and aspire to do so much more than just earn money, a force for good enhancing the health and well-being of society. So keeping your eyes closed still, a business built on love versus stress and fear; teams that are passionate and committed to their work; a culture filled with collaboration and comradery, and then ending each day inspired and freshly committed to what they're doing and the opportunity to be part of something larger than themselves to make a difference and craft a real purposeful life while earning a living. Okay. If you closed your eyes, you can open them. So today we would like to give you some ideas on how to take what you just imagined and make it real. So let's get this discussion started. We're going to have some fun here today. So David, when you discovered what a conscious company is, how did that impact and inspire you?

## How a Conscious Company Impacts and Inspires Leaders

### David Craig Utts (05:34):

I've always aligned with the principles. That's what happens for people that have showed up today. There's something that resonates for you. It just resonates with how you've oriented your life or your business to this time. And for me, that was true. There's two ways in which that resonance can happen. You can have been part of an organization that was conscious. And once you are, you're ruined for the rest of your life because you want to maintain that flavor of that experience of being part of a company that wants to be a force for good in the world, that creates a culture. That's amazing. You walk into every day and as leaders that actually serve you versus the other way around. That happens because you have that experience; for me, it happened because I had an internal shift and, so I became interested back in the early eighties of this whole idea of raising my own consciousness.

(06:30): And again, it ruined me because what happened is I began to crave some more of a holistic and integrated life. And to be more self-aware, it was like a hub for me. And then the spokes went out and how that related to my relationships, the relationship I wanted to be with my significant other and the businesses I wanted to operate from. And that happened right in the beginning of my sales career. And I brought that to heart into my sales career and saw that if I didn't worry about my commission check, but I oriented in a certain way to my customers, and I really built a relationship with them and served that relationship, I would open my commission check every week and be very, very happy with what happened. So that's for me where it all came from.

### Alan Wallner:

We could start seeing through, reading between the lines here a little bit, there's definitely a feeling of fulfillment. You seem to be more energized with what you were doing and just part of something bigger than yourself and just really added a lot of extra fuel to your fire.

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## **Chelsey Paulson (07:49):**

The concept of a conscious culture is newer to me, but like David I've really been living this out for decades now. When I was in college, I went to the university of Minnesota, and they had a newer minor that was called a leadership minor. I went through that and came across servant leadership and was just drawn to it. It was just a great concept. The company that I went into straight out of college operated on a certain leadership culture. It was also an employee-owned company. Prior to coming to Keystone, I had 15 years of HR leadership experience. My philosophy for 15 years was around being employee centric. What is in the best interests of our employees, what is in the best interest of our customers serving each other?

(08:50): That's always been the philosophy. So I came across that this actually had a name as this broader perspective, this broader vision, called conscious company. It was mind blowing to me and made so much sense. I love that there is this concept around it, and I'm happy that we're talking about this because it resonates with a lot of people, but what does it actually mean? I'm just excited to be here today to talk about what does it mean to me? What does it mean to David? How can you implement these things in your company? And I think it becomes such a big intangible thought process at the beginning. I hope we can get across some specifics that you can take away and start working on because it's a lifelong process. You never become completely a conscious company. Part of it is being growth minded and continuous learning and continuous improvement. And how do you keep that going? And so we need to go into this conversation with that mindset and then also leave this conversation with that mindset. So we continue to improve and grow.

## **Alan Wallner (09:59):**

I think you hit on some of the big things. It is intangible, this ambiguous thing out there, conscious company. What does all that mean? But the interesting thing is, a lot of people are already doing this in their business. They're just not realizing that they're doing it or what it is. This is a way of drawing attention to it and actually creating a business model around it so that you can leverage it for your business to be healthier, to have that greater impact beyond what you thought possible. I think you are right on with this. For me, I had been one of those individuals that was always doing this with my business or the way I was living my life, but didn't really realize it until I went through a pretty dark time in my life and my career.

(10:57): And that's when all of a sudden you started seeing that like attracts like, and when you're vibrating at a not such great level, you start attracting all that crazy stuff. Maybe not the best clients, and you're not in the best relationships. But when you hit that bottom, you start seeing the world a little differently, then all of a sudden, this is pretty bad. I can change this if I want to. And once you start becoming more conscious, more aware, more present as you're living your life and doing your job, you start creating a new world. You start attracting the right people, you start finding different opportunities that seem to be a little more aligned with your purpose and in who you are and where you want to go with your life.

(11:51): You start feeling more fulfilled and you start having that energy that David was talking about earlier, and like what Chelsey was talking about. You start this lifelong process

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of continually discovering more, really cool things that you can start bringing into your life and into your business, and then inspiring others and creating a whole culture around it. And that's how it's impacted me. Once I figured out what was going on and started reading up more on this conscious company stuff, conscious capitalism, then I really dove in, jumped in with both feet and fired up and amped up. And funny thing was, I didn't really even realize that there was conscious capitalism, conscious company, or any of that until after we decided to call our company Conscious Branding; then we started doing research on what other conscious companies were out there.

(12:49): And that was like, there's a whole new world. It just solidified a lot of things for us. So segueing to the next question, as a result of becoming more aware and more conscious with what you're doing with your businesses and your career, what have you done to shift your business, your career, and even your personal life to be more conscious? What things have you put in place?

### **Shift Your Career and Personal Life to Be More Conscious**

#### **Chelsey Paulson (13:24):**

There needs to be an understanding, what does this actually look like in companies? And for me, we need to start with the employee first. Coming from HR, that's just natural for me to say, but the longer I was in HR, the more and more necessary I saw that. If you're wondering, where do I start? How do I impact my company? How do I change myself? It really starts first with yourself, self-awareness. Understanding where you're at as a person, what your thoughts are, asking yourself the tough questions of am I trustworthy? Am I empathetic? Do I have a high emotional intelligence? Am I trusting my people? And if the answers are no, why am I not trusting?

(14:15): Why do I feel like I'm not empathetic, and really digging into that to understand yourself better. Once you understand yourself better, then you're better prepared to help build this out around you. And then the next level is your employees. How do you build that really conscious leadership around your employees, to really be focused on them as a servant leadership mentality of serving your employees so that they can succeed so that your company can succeed? So then you can impact the world around you, and your partners and your vendors and your clients, and everyone that you're working with, really become interactive within that process. But again, it has to start with yourself and that introspective thought process and realizing that you're never at the top.

(15:06): I don't care what you're doing. I don't care how successful you are. You never can stop learning. That is a detriment that so many leaders get into is I'm the VP of this now, or I'm the CEO of this now. So I've got it all figured out, or I have to look like I have it all figured out and can't show that I'm not competent in some of these areas. And so as leaders, we also need to be more open about it's okay not to have the answers. You can ask better questions and try to solve for the issues together, rather than always acting like you have all

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the answers. There's a lot that I've done personally. And I think that there's a lot of energy and a lot of stamina that's needed for this.

(15:52): And I always say to leaders, you need to put on your own air mask first, make sure that you have your own mindset figured out, all your buckets are full, whether it's mentally, emotionally, physically, that those are all full and ready to go. And then you can start giving because then your buckets start overflowing and then you can give to others. And so that's my guidance on how I've shifted myself personally, and then how it's really impacted the teams that I've led, the companies that I've led, the clients that we work with. It's really that self-awareness and understanding, and then going to your employees and understanding them and what are their needs and what are their capabilities. And then it keeps going further into your clients, what were your clients' needs and where are they at and how can you create impact on your clients and not be all for profits?

(16:40): Because if you go in with the right intentions and one of our core values is impact over profits. We want to go in and create an impact. First, we want to give, give, give, get. Because then it happens that way, the more you give the more you get. Where you vibrate at is what you're going to get back. And it's the same thing if you're giving at some point, you're going to get back. That's really one of our philosophies when we go with our clients, is really making that impact, understanding what their needs are and then serving those needs.

### **Alan Wallner (17:11):**

I like that image of putting your air mask on first, very appropriate. Otherwise, how can you lead if you're not in the right disposition yourself? And then also the whole idea of the servitude disposition from the employees, because that then filters through, it's a servitude to your clients. You were talking about the energy that's involved. You start revving up a whole culture. This becomes the fuel for your culture. People are energized and want to come to work every day because they're not just going to work now.

### **Chelsey Paulson (17:53):**

The other thing with that is that the next step after self-awareness, employee awareness, then it's your greater culture awareness and you need to understand where are you at today? And then once you understand where are you at today, then where do you want to get to? And then how are you going to get there? This is what we talk about at Keystone all the time, what's your strategy around culture, which is not a common philosophy. People think, Oh, well we have some culture issues. And so we're going to do fun things like go to a Twins game or do a picnic or a barbecue or something. The fun is one little piece of the whole culture pie. What are the other pieces of culture that you need to think about and improve upon in order to really create that conscious culture? You start with the baseline, where are you at? Where do you want to go and how are you going to get there?

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## David Craig Utts (18:51):

I'm going to go back to the word we've used a lot, which was really building self-awareness. And when I work with my clients, I define that in a particular way. I say self-awareness is about becoming aware of the one who is aware, in you. That's really what self-awareness is at the highest level. And then the outcome of that is you began to notice things you didn't notice before. And a lot of times that happens because you hit a wall and begin to recognize the value of doing that. Self-awareness is so important; we point to neuroscience research that's coming out that says 95 plus percent of the time human beings are walking around on autopilot.

(19:49): And what that means is we're using our past and our past experiences to process in the moment when we're not self-aware and we automatically react to those in the past. That's what we're doing all the time. When you begin to put that into perspective for an executive, they begin to recognize that that may not lead to a lot of innovation. The best way I can practically apply it for myself is when I've been working with a client rather than my story, mine has been an organic journey. I don't want to get into it; it can get too long and it's ugly at points.

(20:23): I was working with a guy, Bob, who's a CEO of a media company. And I remember walking in the first day to work with him. He was this short Irish guy that had this huge energy. He got up from his desk and he walked around to me and he said, I'm so excited to get to work with you right now. What are we going to do first? I said, Bob, you've got to start working on what your vision is for the company and for your role in this company. And he turned around to me and he said, well, I have problems with my senior team. I don't know what my vision is going to have to do. We've got to solve these problems. And I said, well, bear with me.

(21:01): You just hired me and spent a bunch of money. So give me a chance. And go off and do this exercise. Once you do the exercise, I want you to read this every day. It sounds like a simple exercise. He resisted it at first, but I remember about a week and a half later, I got a call from him and he said, I'm very excited about our session that's about to come up. I can't wait for you to come in. So I was curious about what that was about. And when I went into the meeting I saw a growth in his self-awareness fundamentally. And I got in the meeting, he got up and he said, I got to tell you what happened. I've done this, what you've asked me to do.

(21:36): And what I begin to notice is that the prescription that I'm looking at the world through has broadened, and I'm seeing things I never saw before. I'm recognizing opportunities that are happening. Moment to moment. For example, I had a guy walk in my office the other day that I know I had to have a conversation with because he was having some difficult relationship issues with some of his direct reports. And he handed me a book on influence. And I recognized in that moment, that was an opportunity to listen to him and what he learned in that book. And then I was able to give him feedback in that context. And so that's the kinds of things that have been starting to happen for me. And I recognize that

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I've got to get this embodied into the rest of my people. And so that leads to the next step that Chelsey was talking about.

(22:20): How do you broaden that self-awareness? It automatically begins to happen when you recognize what you desire your impact to be. And that's making your aspirations conscious. And putting it out there. And our attention is our greatest power, depending on where we put our attention is what we tend to create. So if we're coming in every day and just operating our business, that's what happens. We just focus on what we focus on, but when we consciously focus our attention, we began to shift into new directions. How are we engaging our people? How are we building a culture that inspires, uplifts and improves accountability? How do we relate to our customers and increase the value of the customer experience? You start recognizing by sharpening your attention on the various areas of conscious capitalism.

(23:15): We began to see focus in a different way and thus produce a different quality results. The last thing I want to say is, a lot of times people start talking about this and they say, profit is important. Of course profit is important. But if you look at the research on conscious companies out there, and this came out of the "Firms of Endearment" book that I'm sure you're familiar with; it was a foundations of conscious capitalism that studied places like Southwest, Costco, Chipotle, Caterpillar. And what they found is these businesses operated over 15 years against the S&P and they have their cumulative returns of 14 to 1. And by the way, good to great they outperformed good to great companies, 6 to 1. So there is also important to mention that the impact, not only for the people coming to work and for you as an individual, there is an impact on the bottom line and applying this model. And once you get it, you realize being a more conscious is a more profitable way to do business. So now,

### **Alan Wallner (24:15):**

You have to bring in the numbers to this as well, because you can't just have this "whoohoo culture," if that's what you want to call it, it does pay back to the numbers that they do go hand in hand. And when you can get those working synergistically, it is amazing the power and the life force that starts building within your company.

### **David Craig Utts (24:41):**

One of the things I was thinking about from a practical basis, how you explain this, conscious companies recognize the value of context and aligning that with tactics, and I think more or less conscious companies get everybody the functions working well, creating their expectations and their numbers and analysis, and they get them to do it, but then they have silos. But when you're talking about context and context is the vision and the purpose that sets a context for action. Leadership is a context. Culture is a huge context. Relationships are a context. How do we want to do relationships? Those are contextual. And with a conscious body, what they do is they don't just put those up on the wall, the values up on the wall, and forget about it.

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(25:27): And we see that, I'm sure Chelsey seen that happen. We work really hard in the retreat. We get everything clear. We put it on the wall and then we go back to normal business; conscious companies don't do that. They use those mechanisms as decision-making criteria, that everything is channeled through. And quite frankly, that's hard work because you're learning constantly. You're seeing what you don't know, and you're having to face yourself in a certain way. And you're learning all along the way, but it's also a much more rich and weighty way to do business.

**Alan Wallner (25:59):**

This is the foundational context, and people often think of their branding as their logo, but in reality, it's the perception that people will have based on the experience you created for them. So what we're talking about here is, can you imagine having a conscious culture creating these amazing experiences for your customers, they're going to go out there and rave about you and tell other people about you and bring more people toward you. That's how it changed our businesses. We realized what was happening here in that foundational context and how branding fits in with that. So we created a conscious branding approach, and that's why we renamed the company. It's a way of being your brand.

(26:51): And it integrates with every aspect of your business, culture, leadership, the way you want to position your impact, the value you want to create the relationships that you have, the emotion you want behind your business. And that's what you are talking about, these are all the elements that come together as a culture, as a leader. How are you being those aspects, of being a conscious person, being aware; like you said, aware of the one who is aware. So if you start there, then what Chelsey was saying earlier, too, it's aspirational. It's mapping out who you'd like to be in the world you want to create. And where are you today? And how do I get there? That's, what this is all about. And it is foundational.

(27:44): You can't build a house on a bad foundation, if you do, it's going to fall down. So the same thing is with your business, with building a conscious company, we really work on that foundation, get it through to your team, through mission statements, posters on the wall, whatever it is, so that everyone is consistently delivering on that daily and living and breathing it and being it. And that's exactly what you are talking about. That's how I've evolved, how I've been really tapped into this and, you're right, it does start impacting profitability. If you put others first and you focus on their well-being and their success, their ability to go out and have a greater impact as well, while all that starts coming back to you at some point. I'll segue into a new question: how does being a conscious company impact the relationships with your clients, your prospects, even your employees? So if it impacts them, do they care that you're a conscious company?

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## Being a Conscious Company Impacts all of Your Business Relationships

### David Craig Utts (29:02):

The founders of the conscious capitalism and Twin Cities talk a lot about trust and, fundamentally to me, figuring out how to trust somebody, where we have four assessments or opinions that we're looking to build that trust. Number one, if I'm speaking to somebody, there's some assessment, are they authentic? Can I trust what's coming out of their mouth? And is it consistent with what they do. Is there an authentic authenticity there, that what they say is what they mean. Number two is, are they competent to deliver in the scope? They say they want to deliver to me. And how do I assess that competence? Because that's critical for hiring a vendor or working with somebody, you want to know they're competent.

(29:53): Do they follow through? That's pretty critical to the reliability and the other thing that a lot of times we don't speak about, but could be picked up is, do they really care to be in this relationship with me and that's demonstrated to the other three, but it's also demonstrated in how they communicate with you. So if there is this sense that I'm not really listening when we're in a conversation and that's going to dig on an unconscious level of trust. So that's really essential with the way we do relationships with our employees and how we operate with them, as Chelsey was pointing to them on the servant leadership model that speaks loudly to that relationship. Obviously, the customer experience; that's obvious with our vendors. And how my best experiences as a vendor delivering services was when I had an HR partner who cared about my development as a coach and my development of my business and realized that the more they helped me with that in a certain way, there was something else and I wanted to bring the highest value I could to that relationship.

(30:57): And so that sense of partnership between vendors is also essential. And then our communities, I mean, and all this is good for our brand. All this speaks to all those various stakeholder groups to our brand, which is really a relationship orientated thing. When I see the logo, feel good, my heart warms up and I appreciate what that means to me. That can bring people to you.

### Alan Wallner:

I like how you start bringing in the community and the trust, the competence that falls through and do they care? When you start putting all four of those together, you start seeing a model around relationship building and the types of relationships you'd like to foster.

### Chelsey Paulson (31:54):

So the question of does it impact if you're a conscious company, does it impact your partners, your vendors, your employees? Yes, of course it does. If you truly are a conscious company, a conscious person, a conscious leader, you can't just turn that off. You either are, or you're not. And so if you are, you're implementing this in every area of your life, it's just who you are as a person. If you have that mentality, that mindset is always on. It's going to impact everyone, not just within your work life, but within your personal life as well. And then there's a lot of personal benefits you can get from this mindset as well. Which is a

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whole other podcast. This is business focus. But I agree with David in this, that everyone says trust is the baseline.

(32:47) If you have solid trust with your partners, with your vendors, with your clients, with your employees, that means the world, and they're going to stick with you. They're truly going to partner with you and not just be an employee, there'll be a partner in your journey and aren't going to just be a client. They're going to be a partner in the journey. They're not just using you for some service or product or offering. They want to stick with you because they trust you. You've built that relationship and you'll be able to always ask, well, how do you build trust? It takes a long time. And David talked about relationships and being authentic. I think so many times people see other leaders or other companies and they think, Oh, well, we need to be like that because they're successful.

(33:33): In reality, you're trying to be someone that you're not, that's going to turn off employees. That's going to turn off clients. And so being authentic to who you are and who you want to be, that's going to build the trust more than anything else. And know your strengths, know where you are strong as a person and as a company, and then build on those. I think one of the greatest impacts of having a conscious company is retaining your employees. Again, I go back to the employees. If we don't have solid strong employees who are engaged, who want to be here, who want to do good, then your company can't exist. Yes, you have to have customers, but you need to have employees before you can have customers. You can do only do so much on your own, right? If you're a single-shingle shop, then that's another thing.

(34:18): But if you have full-time employees, part-time employees, consultants that you're partnering with, you really need to work on retaining them. And there's Simon Sinek's latest book, "The Infinite Game." If you haven't read it, I would highly recommend reading it. His whole concept is there's no winners and losers. Winning success is all in your own mind. And what does that mean? What are you really comparing to? And we don't have to think in such binary terms of winner loser either, or it can be both. It can be neither. It can be somewhere in between. There's all this gray area that we can live in and not be worried about. Who's winning and who's losing in this game because it's an infinite game. It doesn't end, businesses don't end. So it's something that keeps on going. And when you have that mentality, it's going to positively impact everyone around you in any way that you interact with them.

### **Alan Wallner (35:14):**

It is very powerful if you start really thinking about that; it opens up more opportunities for you because you're not just driven by achieving a certain goal. You can go beyond that and you can make it big here. And that's what I really like about that thinking; also when you said earlier, you can't turn it off. That is so true; at the end of the day with all this, you have to be true to yourself. Because if you're not that's going to impact everything. I remember a period in my life when I was taking on any client to make money. And what was happening is, maybe I was trying to convert people into a certain way of thinking the way we did things.

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(36:08): And that's not what this is about either, trying to convert people. People are going to have a propensity toward it or not. It's really attracting those individuals who want to have that greater impact, who want to lead with purpose in their business and joining forces with them and even bringing them on as your customers, because those relationships are going to be stronger. They're going to be better. You're going to have greater outcomes, outcomes that you didn't think were even possible. Whereas if you sit there and try to convince someone to act a certain way, to be a certain type of company, it isn't going to happen. They have to hit that wall or hit that barrier before they start realizing that, hey, there's something else going on here now I need to tap into that.

### **Becoming a Conscious Company Can Help You Grow and Innovate**

#### **Alan Wallner (37:04):**

I really like what you have been seeing here. The next question is: how has taking this conscious company approach helped you to grow or innovate with your business? How has it impacted your profits? How has it impacted your ability to think of new services, new products, new offers, new audiences, new ways of being out there in the market? So that ties in with what's going on today and in today's business climate, people need to shift or realign to get the momentum going with their business again. So is tapping into your conscious approach to business, is that a good place to go? And if you could share that with how you've pivoted ( I'm not sure if I like to use that term "pivoted") with your business in terms of drawing out the conscious aspect and leveraging that for your business.

#### **Chelsey Paulson (38:18):**

At Keystone, our philosophy has always been around a conscious company approach. And so as far as pivoting, it hasn't really been on our baseline of who we are, our core of who we are as a company. What we've always talked about is, you need a solid strategy. Every business needs a solid strategy, but then how do you incorporate the people? How do you incorporate the culture into that? Because if you don't have strong people and a strong culture, you're never going to accomplish all of your goals, but you might for a period of time, but your success, whatever that is relatively speaking, will only last for so long. And so that's our intersection, how do you create a conscious company? So you have conscious employees, a conscious culture so that you can have a conscious strategy to then positively affect your clients, your partners, your vendors, and so forth.

(39:19): So we've been in that and I had sent a document, I think we're going to post with this, that really talks through some of that and some really good questions for newer businesses to think about or leadership teams to think about, of what are we doing today? Where are we strong? Where are we weak, where we start along this journey of creating a conscious company and a stronger culture within our company? Because we don't think of how do you necessarily create new clients. We always want new clients, but we really have that purpose over profits approach. We would rather go deeper with our clients and helping serve those needs that they might have then just bringing on new clients. People often ask,

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well, what's your niche? What's your market? What's your industry. We don't have an industry.

(40:09): We have a mindset. We want to work with people that are growth minded. They want to grow. They know they don't have it all figured out and they want some assistance guiding and directing them and helping them figure that out. So we're more about mindset than we are about necessarily bringing on new clients or a certain industry. When you have that mentality, you just start to go deeper within those clients and how can you serve them better? And then your services start to evolve based off of those needs. And especially when you're talking about people and culture, you start to see consistent themes across companies. And so you just start to evolve your business based off of the needs that you see. You're always going to be relevant when you're serving the needs of your clients.

**Alan Wallner (40:55):**

I really like how you've taken this and broken out of the box, the stereotypical way of defining who your target audience is, mindset is our niche. You've proven how you can leverage a conscious approach to your business: Hey, we're going to go work with people who've got a certain mindset. That is out of the box.

**David Craig Utts (41:34):**

My approach has always been that way. And I was actually glad to see, in 2012, when the book got published, because I felt like I had my kindred spirits I can hang out with. And that's why I become executive director of the chapter. The new products and services, and I think Keystone has done a stellar job at this as well, how do we walk our talk. During COVID there was so many things going on for people and it was not, it still is a very dicey sales environment, we have to be approaching our relationships with this orientation of serving them. And as much as you admit that we'd like to have more business coming in we have to walk our talk.

(42:19): During COVID, I decided to simply offer my executive clients safe harbor for as much as they wanted. And we set up conversations and there was no expectation of paying. And it was more about leading through a crisis. We had thousands of blog articles out there and meeting through crisis. What I saw the clients needed was a place to talk about their own personal concerns and their own fears. They don't have to be so strong in front of the people; they can actually share and have a sounding board. And I got all these virtual people, all this virtual workforce. Now how do I deal with that? What that led to is me getting information from clients about what was top of mind, which has allowed me to begin to target offers around supporting your virtual workforce, dealing with self-leadership, which I think is more important right now than any other time.

(43:18): How do we start with my own self-leadership and begin to create a good virus, if you will, out into the organization where self-leadership can grow and around me, how can I support others to take on self-leadership? Because there are also employees dealing with fear and they're dealing with, how do I bring myself a hundred percent to work every day? So how can I help teach my clients to create an environment where they're teaching that. So

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that came out of simply trying to do my best to serve my clients in that condition and I'm not trying to pat myself on the back, but when you're walking, you're talking. Keystone did the same thing. New audiences is also the same thing when you're growing your business. The marketing experts say you got to pick your niche.

(44:02): Early on in coaching, I will admit, I was in the beginning. I have been coaching for 25 years; coaching has been around for going to be 28, 29 years. I was like shooting ducks to get business, a lot of HR departments were starting coaching programs. And I launched, and I tended to work with technical individuals. I work with technical leaders very well, how to teach them how to be in relationship and why it's important to set context for meeting. Sometimes that's very basic stuff, but how do you teach that to somebody that's looking for a technical way to do that in a certain way, but also get to the heart of what it is.

(44:43): And through that, I developed my intellectual property and, and serving that client base. And now, as Chelsey pointed out, my clients are not a specific group. They're people that, with the mindset that Chelsey said, recognize that their development of themselves is critical to the development of the business. And they have particular problems that they're facing with burnout, trying to manage people in the organization, trying to figure out how to get their idea adopted within the organization, because it's a good idea that could help the company, but bringing that to the table and getting that adopted. So those are the kinds of things I work on with them and also their own sense of clarity and confidence in executive presence. The idea is that I work with those areas, but those are the ways that I deal with new audiences and thought leadership. The intellectual property grew out of serving my clients.

## Challenges with Being a Conscious Leader and a Conscious Company

### Alan Wallner:

I like your little description of facing a fear head on and actually mimicking it in terms of you being more contagious around what you're doing for other people versus the model. So while doing all of this, what has been your biggest challenge while striving to be more of a conscious leader, a conscious company?

### Chelsey Paulson (46:15):

It's not easy work. It takes a lot of effort. It takes a lot of focus. It takes a lot of self-reflection and time spent on this. It's not just going to happen. There has to be deep thought put into it. There has to be deep conversations around this. And if you have a company with multiple leaders, everyone has to be on the same page. It's really hard to do this if you have one leader who doesn't agree with this philosophy. I've been a part of a company that we had a CEO come in from the outside that wasn't a culture fit. We went through the hiring process, the whole nine yards of interviews and assessments and psychological assessments. And you think you make the right decision, but you never know until someone comes in and it just fundamentally changed the organization.

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(47:16): You really need to have leaders all on the same page and walking the walk and it's hard to do. And it has to be a constant focus. It has to be continuous learning. And it has to be a topic of conversation that's on the agenda. If you do quarterly planning sessions, you do annual planning sessions, you have regular meetings or thought leadership type summits. You need to be thinking about this because it's not just going to happen. And what areas do you need to focus on? And there'll be peaks and valleys. It's not a flat line. It's not a steady incline. You're going to hit the ceiling and how are you going to break through that ceiling? And then you're going to keep going up that high. You're going to break through that next ceiling. There's always going to be those layers to break through.

(48:00): And so you have to have the grit, the stamina, the resiliency to do so. And I think especially now resiliency is one of the top character traits that's necessary to be successful as an individual and in a company. And again, going back to not necessarily having all the answers and being transparent and saying, I don't know, here's my best guess. And here's what I think or better yet, what do you think, give me your perspective and getting the greater good of the communication there and get the group to think in a positive way of let's work together to solve this, rather than feel like you have to have all the answers. It's hard, it's easy to talk about. It's hard to implement. But if you can figure out where you're at today and where your gaps are, that's the best next step, don't try to eat the whole elephant, eat one bite at a time.

### **Alan Wallner (48:56):**

Imperfect action, right? You hit on some key things. Having everyone on the same page, that is critical to the success of it, as well as it's a lifestyle, it's a way of living your life. Yes, it is a lot of challenges and everything, but it also brings out some amazing rewards too.

### **David Craig Utts (49:49):**

Chelsey pointed out that this is an arduous journey. One of the reasons why people may initially resist it is because intuitively, it's a bit of an arduous journey. The rewards are great, and once you begin to taste the rewards of expanding either a conscious company or the consciousness within yourself, the rewards are there. But even though I've been meditating since 1982, and I've been in the consciousness raising areas, I've moved that into my business, by getting a masters in OD and going into coaching business, I've had my journey. I haven't had an addiction background, and I think there's a lot more people in the organizations that are dealing with that, especially today. And there's also the challenges of how you overcome what was very challenging and difficult and yet rewarding. And now I'm going to stand in the right situations where I can help people with that. So the reward is always there if you're willing to continue down on the journey. I've worked with many executives who say, I just don't understand why I do it, I lose it. And when that happens, I just get triggered and I lose it.

(50:37): Really, we can beat ourselves up about that or we can look for the solution, which is to become more self-aware and really understand what has to be healed in us to resolve that issue that allows us to be more of a servant leader. It's a journey. And once you crack the eggshell, you can't go back either. Once you open up, it begins, it's almost like the

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flower of expansion that begins to happen by itself. And you realize it's not my path, but it's happening to me. Something happened within me. And it's also happening with my business. When you start doing this as a business, you cannot pull back from it.

(51:23): We've all seen culture initiatives where they talk the right talk, but then they didn't follow through and that decimates the trust in the organization. So you really have to open it up, and many are still stuck in the old model. There's a realization. It can be a bit arduous, but again, it's worthwhile because what you're creating is so far bigger than anything you could create on your own that you can't turn back from it. There's so much more enrichment.

**ATTENDEE QUESTION:** *Does consciousness as a business virtue also involve nonspreadsheet variables such as ethics, morality and the balance of fair exchange?*

**Alan Wallner (51:56):**

This is the last five minutes of our episode, and this is where I tap into what's going on with our audience and answer an ABQ, another burning question. We have one here from one of our attendees: Does consciousness as a business virtue also involve nonspreadsheet variables such as ethics, morality and the balance of fair exchange?

**David Craig Utts (52:47):**

Absolutely. And I think this goes back to why we have values in a business, certainly ethics are important because there's more of a defining around that. But again, it's contextual to how we operate with each other as human beings. And when going back to really truly, why we have a vision, we can only do things moment to moment. So the vision is meant to help us operate consistently with the vision now, because we can't create the vision in the future. We can lean into it. And part of that is how are we going to treat each other? What are our ethics? I would say that over time, setting those standards, while important, becomes less important as people buy into the conscious model, because then they begin to transform and change. I'm not saying all cases, and I'm not saying you have to be mindful of this, but there seems to be a shift in the way people operate with each other.

(53:47): I don't see myself, I see myself as separate from you. And when I see myself, when I see the impact I'm having on you and the impact you're having on me and what we're trying to do together, I began to protect that more. And you see that with people that really buy into the value. So it's all that is really critically important. And it's all part of having sometimes very challenging conversations about what that means and what happens when we cross certain lines and how do we deal with that? But that's what you sign up for when you're a conscious company, to have what I call authentic, courageous conversations about what's important. And that's what the question you just had is all included in that.

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## **Chelsey Paulson (54:32):**

It's all encompassing, a conscious company is all encompassing. It's everything. It's not just metrics. It's not just employee experience. It's everything that's incorporated into being a business. And when you talk about ethics or integrity, it goes beyond following policies and following laws and guidelines and things like that. It's what is the right thing to do as a human being. Not just what does the law tell us. What does our handbook tell us of how we should handle the situation? What is the right thing to do? Because we are all human beings. David, you alluded to this with dependency issues and mental health issues. And all of these things being magnified right now. We need to put a lot of human being into our conversations and how we're treating each other and how we're treating our employees and how we're asking questions and digging into things. It's all encompassing. That's just the best way to put it. Any decision you make, any conversation you have, can be said and thought about with a conscious mindset.

## **Closing Remarks**

### **Alan Wallner (55:47):**

Well said, That is a good way to wrap up. So nice job. I really appreciate it. In closing, I want to thank David and Chelsey for sharing their insights and wisdom today. I'd like to thank all of our attendees. I appreciate you being part of Thrive!cast, and I hope you enjoyed the conversation. If you have any follow-up questions, please send them to [info@consciousbranding.com](mailto:info@consciousbranding.com) and we will respond to you. We'll also be sending you a follow-up link to the recording of this episode, along with some bonus materials.

(56:24): And by all means, feel free to share this with other business owners that you think would be interested. Our next Thrive!cast episode will be in November. We're going to take a bit of a break. We're getting the new episodes queued up, and if you have any ideas for topics you'd like to see covered in upcoming Thrive!cast episodes, please let us know @ [info@consciousbranding.com](mailto:info@consciousbranding.com). And in October, Conscious Branding is launching its online program called Brand GuideStar. If you'd like to learn more about it, go to [thrive.consciousbranding.com](http://thrive.consciousbranding.com). I look forward to seeing you back in November, and remember, you create your world, so believe in your vision, drive it with purpose and above all take action. Until next time be remarkable.

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