



COACHING AS A

PILLAR

IN THE FOUNDATION OF CONVENE



Startup companies face daunting challenges establishing a workplace culture. Convene was no different. Specializing in the design and service of work, meeting and event spaces, Convene wanted to be mindful and deliberate as it developed its culture. Founders Ryan Simonetti and Chris Kelly recognized the challenge was two-fold; support its small and young workforce in the early startup stages, but also sustain the company through its future growth.

Launched in 2009, Convene grew from one location with 22 employees to a network of 32 locations with more than 800 employees in cities from Los Angeles to London. While many young companies are plagued with growing pains, the co-founders of Convene adopted a coaching program to invest in every team member's growth.

Leadership, personal growth and empathy in the workplace are values the founders took from their own

work with coaches and built into the organization's culture from the beginning. With this foundation, Convene emerged as one of the leading businesses transforming workplaces around the world.

To acknowledge Convene's investment in coaching as part of the company's foundational culture and continued growth, the International Coaching Federation (ICF) recognized the company as a finalist for the 2019 ICF International Prism Award. The Prism Award program honors organizations that have achieved the highest standard of excellence in coaching programs that yield discernible and measurable positive impacts, fulfill rigorous professional standards, address key strategic goals, and shape organizational culture. (Learn more at coachfederation.org/prism-award.)

A 'People First' Foundation

Coaching at Convene began with Simonetti's and Kelly's early decision to focus on people first, including themselves. Both founders were young when they launched Convene and had limited

experience as business leaders. They grew alongside their team, working the front lines and developing a close relationship with employees at every level of the organization.

“We were able to chase opportunities that allowed us to learn and grow,” Kelly says. “We have the same belief that every single person in our organization can grow at the same rate if provided with the right resources. Coaching has been so integral to our success and helps people to identify what their strengths and what their weaknesses are, and also what their goals and hopes and fears are. It helps them to become extremely self-aware.”

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Chris Kelly
Founder, Convene

A Three-Pronged Approach to Coaching

The coaching program at Convene began with an internally developed leadership program called the Human Centered Leadership Mastermind class, which was available to interested employees at all levels. Since then, the program has expanded to meet growing demand and now includes additional external coaches and even the opportunity for employees to obtain a coaching certification themselves. These additional coaching elements support Convene as it grows, weaving a coaching culture into all elements of the company. Today, these three components of Convene’s coaching program —internal, external and employee-certified coaches—work together to support a culture of learning, leadership and internal growth.

“This three-pronged approach has created a language internally,” says director of learning and development Julie Starr. “Every person who joins Convene as a new hire is given an introduction to our coaching vocabulary so we are all speaking the

same language. From there, the team starts to build that self-awareness muscle and progress through our internal programs.”

The path through the internal coaching programs at Convene begins with a three-hour workshop for every new hire that focuses on self-awareness and giving employees the vocabulary to help them talk about how they “show up” as a leader. Next, a three-week webinar series takes a deep-dive into self-awareness, specifically focusing on identifying one’s “inner critic.” This webinar series functions as a pre-requisite for the Human Centered Leadership Mastermind class. All new supervisors and above participate in the training, created and run by an executive coach, that exposes them to coaching and leadership skills.

The following optional eight-week Human Centered Leadership Mastermind class, 14 of which have been completed since it began in 2013, has reached more than 150 employees. It is broken into two parts: the first half of the class gives employees the foundational skills of coaching, such as goal setting and providing feedback, to understand the coach-centric approach used at Convene; and the second half has students applying those skills in exercises, so they can take them back into the workplace and continue using them in their day-to-day activities.

How to Measure Success

The biggest impact from Convene’s coaching program is the growth demonstrated through internal promotions and transfers. Since launching in 2009, Convene has made a commitment to supporting employees personal and professional growth. In 2019 alone, the company made more than 150 internal promotions or transfers. Of those employees being promoted or transferred, 42 percent participated in the Human Centered Leadership Mastermind training or received one-on-one coaching with a Certified Professional Coach. These internal promotions and transfers demonstrate the effectiveness of leadership within the company and its ongoing commitment to continue individual growth for every employee.

Regional vice president of sales Erin Wade said, “In my 20-plus year sales career working for large hospitality

companies, this is the first time there has been a formalized program to work with a coach. To have time every two weeks with someone outside the company, with years of experience in similar situations, has been tremendous—especially in my first year in a new company. Our mutual commitment to our bimonthly calls forces me to take the time to be thoughtful about my business and my people. I consider it a gift that has made me a stronger leader.”

Investing in Leadership for Growth

As the senior leadership team grew from six members in 2013 to 38 in 2018, Convene’s integration of coaching has set the company up for continued success. In an effort to prepare the organizational structure for high growth, Convene in 2018 began requiring all senior leaders to engage in coaching over the following 18 months, making it a true pillar of the organization.

“Coaching has been one of the greatest investments I have made in my professional career. The time spent with my coach and the self-reflection afterwards has made me a better leader, employee and person,” says Thomas Toepke, head of acquisitions – real estate.

The Future of Coaching at Convene

As Convene continues to grow, Kelly and Simonetti look for new opportunities to scale the coaching program. One of those is to sponsor Convene team members to attain their own ICF Credentials. Convene currently has one ICF-credentialed coach on staff, with additional employees pursuing accredited training and ICF Credentials. Additionally, Convene plans to incorporate new technologies and coaching methods,

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such as peer-to-peer coaching and online platforms, into their coaching program to reach more employees.

Kelly remarks, “The five-year vision for what success feels like is ‘Do employees of Convene feel like they show up every single day and they’re actively learning and growing?’ That’s what success feels like to me and whatever our team has to do to navigate towards that feeling, we will do.”

For Convene, a decision was made early in the startup’s creation to have coaching serve as one of the pillars of the company. Co-founders Simonetti and Kelly made developing a coaching culture a top priority. As a result, Convene has created a workplace where people want to come in every day, learn and lead their teams, and develop self-awareness that transforms their lives—even as rapid growth keeps the company evolving. With coaching woven into the organization’s culture, Convene operates a network of hospitality-driven offices across the United States that is run by a team of engaged, receptive and driven individuals. 🍌

In 2020, the International Coaching Federation (ICF) celebrates 25 years as the global organization for coaches and coaching. ICF is dedicated to advancing the coaching profession by setting high ethical standards, providing independent certification and building a worldwide network of credentialed coaches across a variety of coaching disciplines. Its 35,000-plus members located in 143 countries work toward the common goal of enhancing awareness of coaching, upholding the integrity of the profession, and continually educating themselves with the newest research and practices.



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