

Convene Podcast Transcript

Convene Interview, ep. 1

**Note: the transcript is AI generated, excuse typos and inaccuracies*

[00:06] **Leonard Hoops:** The human condition is such that people who want to achieve more are going to end up not having that great of a balance in finding this.

[00:18] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Welcome to the Convene podcast. My name is Magdalina Atanassova, digital media editor at Convene. Today, I'm joined by Leonard Hoops, who serves as president and CEO of Visit Indy and Tourism. Tomorrow, Indy Leonard leads a team of 58 industry professionals who are charged with growing central Indiana's nearly 6 billion convention, tourism and event business. What impressed me is that under Leonard's leadership, Visit Indy has shattered all time records for convention tourism sales, and Indianapolis has been named number one convention city in America by USA Today. Leonard has also been involved with PCMA in one way or another for a significant portion of his career, and he's currently chair of PCMA's 2024 board of directors and trustees. And honestly, I can keep on going. Leonard is a great pleasure to have you on the podcast.

[01:15] **Leonard Hoops:** Thank you for having me, Maggie. Thank you for that lovely introduction. I think the only other person who says that much about me is my mom.

[01:24] **Magdalina Atanassova:** That's awesome. And seriously, could have kept going on and on. But I want to ask you, how has PCMA played a role in your career? Can you share some of the highlights?

[01:38] **Leonard Hoops:** Yeah, absolutely. Maggie. First of all, it's a great honor and privilege to be the chair of PCMA. I've been part of this industry for 30 years now, and for almost all 30 of those years, I've been a PCMA member. When I first got my first job in the industry in 1995, I was actually not familiar with PCMA. I wasn't, frankly, familiar with destination management organizations or the breadth of the convention, trade show and meetings industry around the world. And a couple years into that job, I attended my first convening leaders. And it was at my very first convening leaders, I realized, as people like to say, I had found my tribe, the types of people who were involved in strategizing and executing these events, and then on the business partner side, like visit Indy. And at the time I was at the San Jose, California Convention and Visitors Bureau. It was just the sorts of people that really resonated with me. And in that almost 30 years now, as a PCMA member, I've felt just so many great friendships that have been locked everything from career development to just simply being people who I know and love and will be lifelong friends as a result of this industry. So, you know, PCMA does three things really well. I think it provides great content so that, you know, education, training, career development, all those sorts of things, but the content you get from being a PCMA member, great connections and, you know, so the relationships you make, the new people you're introduced to, there's really a welcomeness, I find with PCMA versus other industry associations or different types of professional trade organizations that people just want to, they go out of their way to want to be friendly to you and to help you advance in your career. And then the third part is commerce, and they facilitate commerce. So whether it's, you know, whether it's me as a business event partner and the organizations I've worked for, helping to find the right customers along the way, whether it's people in their career development, therefore getting bigger jobs and more income as a result. That content, that connection and that commerce, I think is at the core of what PCMA delivers. And it's right up the line of what Sheriff likes to talk about. With PCMA being the platform for the business events industry where we are moving the world forward both socially and economically.

[03:59] **Magdalina Atanassova:** I like these three pillars that you put together. I feel they're very relevant and also thinking of a career path. You need these three pillars to advance your career. So can you share a bit more about your personal career path and what led up to this appointment with Visit Indy? Because I know it's been a long road. You said already 30 years.

[04:20] **Leonard Hoops:** Yeah, 30 years in this industry. I was nearly seven in the corporate world before that. So I'm older than some people realize. Many people realize I'm this old, but some, some don't. Like a lot of people in this industry, both on the partner and on the business strategy side, I kind of found my way to it. I didn't. I'm always impressed when I meet like college students. Now we have a university in downtown Indiana, University of Indianapolis, and they have a strong event management program. So I'm always meeting college age students who plan this as a career. I did not. And I know a lot of others in the industry didn't. And then we find it and fall in love with it. I started off in college as a journalism, I have a journalism degree between a cat degree as my undergrad and thought I wanted to be a sports writer. So I love professional sports and amateur sports and I thought, hey, let me find a job where one day I'll get to go to a Super bowl and an indie 500 and a World Series and an NBA all

star game. And while I was in college I did some professional sports coverage. I remember going to a San Francisco Giants major League baseball game one time and in the locker room afterward, I had a very unpleasant experience interviewing one of the athletes. And I thought he was just very arrogant and rude and dismissive to me. And I remember driving home that night thinking, do I really want to be a sports writer? I want to go to these events. But I don't know that I like the culture of being in this locker room and these sorts of things. I started figuring out what can I do with that journalism degree? I wound up getting a job with a Fortune 120 company. So a fairly large global organization that was in, I think at the time, they were in 16 countries and more than 50 offices globally. And I worked in their San Jose, California division, a billion dollar defense division. And while I was there, they paid for my MBA. So I got a business degree after the journalism degree, and then as a reward for graduating, they offered me an extensive program where they were going to move me around the country in three different jobs over the next six to nine years. And I was going to work in operations and finance and marketing in different divisions. And while many people, I think, would have found that very intriguing, I had not found my drive at that point. I didn't see myself working in those types of jobs, even though it sounded intriguing. And so I'm old enough to remember that there was a day, at least in the US, where you would find jobs in the Sunday newspaper. So the Sunday paper, I don't know how it is in Europe and Asia and South America, but the Sunday paper in the US, still to this day. But back, back, as I was early in the industry, would have almost every job you could think of would be listed in that Sunday paper. That's where people would go looking for new jobs. And there was a job for the San Jose convention, a visitor bureau for the director of public relations. And I thought, well, I could use this journalism undergrad, this business degree, and maybe find my way in this other industry. So I got that job and I was the director of PR for about two years. And then serendipity, the vice president of marketing job, opened up and I became VP of marketing. And that's when I became very more actively involved with PCMA because I started going to convene and understanding with the convention sales team was targeting and that sort of thing. Then a few years later, in 1999, so maybe four years into my journey, I ended up becoming the interim head of the sales department, in addition to VP of marketing. And that interim job lasted for two years until I left for my next job in Sacramento. So it wasn't, it was a very long interim. But in that, in those two years of running sales, you really, that's when you definitely go, you know, through the deep end of the pool with PCMA, where I was getting to meet all sorts of customers and understanding the differences between how association meetings and corporate meetings work and the different verticals within association, etcetera. But, you know, from there, I went from San Jose to Sacramento. My wife is from Sacramento. And when I got offered a job in Sacramento to be their chief marketing officer at their banks and visitors bureau, I thought that was maybe my last stop. Because, hey, you know, if your wife, if you're moving back to wife's hometown, you probably, you think you're going to wind up there. But then a few years later, I got offered the opportunity to be the executive VP in San Francisco in 2006. And I was in that job until 2011. And then a recruiter called me about the Indianapolis job. And so that's how I ultimately wound up in Indy. In 2011, late 2010, actually, I got called to interview for the Indy job, and there's a very specific PC. I made connection to that as well, because it's a very easy date to remember. On January 11 of 2011, which is 111 eleven deep CMA was convening leaders happening in Las Vegas. And so I was in Vegas, and that's where the recruiter was having the Indianapolis people interview like a dozen candidates, because they knew that a lot of the industry folks who might be interested in this job would be at PCMA, in Las Vegas, at convening leaders. So I was one of those dozen people that interviewed that day, and I came out lucky enough to get the job. Here I am, 13 years later, still in that job, and unbelievably to me, finding myself to be the chair of PCMA's board and the foundation as well.

[09:32] **Magdalina Atanassova:** So I love your journey and all the serendipitous moments, and that explains why you were so good in pickleball. Your love sports, right?

[09:45] **Leonard Hoops:** Well, you know, it's funny, the whole pickleball thing. When physics Seattle sent an email to me and sheriff to invite us to do this for the foundation, I honestly really didn't want to do it, not because I didn't think I would do okay at it. I just thought it was weird to pit me against, you know, the CEO of PCMA puts us in kind of an adversarial, competitive role. But sheriff was all over it. He was like, let's do it. And I said, okay. And I. Neither one of us had ever picked up a pickleball paddle before. I mean, literally the first time I ever hit a pickleball was about 3 hours before that match. But you know, I'm a decent ping pong and tennis player and things like that. I have a feeling I have a little more practice with those other sports.

[10:25] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Than Sherek did, or just leave it at that. Right. And now that you took the role of being a chair, you're also the very first chair who represents the DMO. So what does that really mean to you personally and what kind of impact are you hoping to have on the association?

[10:47] **Leonard Hoops:** Well, when sheriff shared that with me and I had been thinking that this had been done because we've had chairs of DMO's for the foundation. I think of Philip Jones and Angie Rinali and others who have been with DMOs when the foundation was a separate entity. And then we've had chairs from other partners, suppliers, but they were all from convention centers. So Greg Odell from DC, Claire Smith from Vancouver, most recently Charles Starks from Nashville. But they're all venue folks. So when sheriff was like, you know, you're actually the first one from a DMO to do the association and the foundation, I was, you know, excited that that was an opportunity. I've actually had some folks from DMOs come up to me at convening, leaders who saw me at business events Industry Week, who have shared with me how excited they are that the DMO space, which has obviously been a long time partner and has a huge number of members within PCMA, but how excited they were that a DMO was in that space. I try not to read too much into it because at the same time I don't want this to be perceived by business event strategists as somehow or another the DMO's are going to start taking over PCMA because we don't want that. The reality is that for Visit Indy and all our other DMOs around the world to be successful as partners in PCMA, we need and want the business event strategist to flourish and to be in these leadership roles. And so I think the door opened for me. I don't know that I opened the door, but the door opened for me as a DMO and I think it will open for more DMOs down the road. But you know, and it's funny because we hadn't had any DMO's and the very next chair after me will be Neil Brownlee and he is the DMO for Scotland, for the country of Scotland. But then after that we've got Kelly Ricker coming in, who's our secretary treasurer now, and she works for a major medical association. And so I think you're going to see moving forward that there's going to be some balance. It's not going to be, you know, all of DMOs, it's not going to be all business event strategists. You may see another corporate person down the road, you know, the person who opened that door years ago, Katie Quigley, when she went from the association world of Microsoft. You probably see more of that with PCMA, having acquired CEMA and now, you know, trying to kind of match what PCMA does well while maintaining the culture of CEMA. But it's a great honor to be PCMA chair, regardless of where you're from, but kind of a double honor from my perspective, to be also the first from a DMO.

[13:12] **Magdalena Atanassova:** And you kind of alluded to CEMA, the acquisitions and all the investments that have been happening at PCMA. And there are a lot of investment projects also that happen in Indianapolis. So what excites you the most, and what should planners pay attention to?

[13:30] **Leonard Hoops:** Well, I've never been so excited about seeing a hole in the ground, but there is a big hole a block away from my office that used to be covered in small buildings. And plaza, it's called Pan Am Plaza. And in 1987, Indianapolis hosted something called the Pan American Games, which was kind of the Olympics of the western hemisphere, but I don't know that even exists in its current form anymore. But, so that plaza, since 87, had really been underutilized. It's a huge couple of square blocks in downtown Indianapolis, and it has been used for things like when tv broadcasts cover the Super bowl or things of that nature. They've been on that plaza doing live shots and things like that. But when you're using a plaza like that a couple times a year, you're really underutilizing it most of the year. And so back in 2014, I really started advocating, along with our organization as a whole, that we needed to have another headquarter hotel in Indianapolis to better deliver to our customers and particularly the PCMA world. And that we needed an expansion of our convention center. In particular, we needed more ballroom and breakout space. And after ten years, we finally broke ground on that late last year. And then about three or four months ago, the construction equipment came in and started demolishing the buildings on that site and digging the hole. And now there's a giant hole there. And just the other day, I was, two days ago, I was with half dozen folks from Hilton, their global corporate team, and they were looking at the site because that is going to be a Signia by Hilton 800 room hotel, along with a convention center spanning with a 50,000 square foot ballroom. And it'll connect right across the street to the existing convention center. And we were in the one office building on that side that will remain. And we were looking out the window at the big hole and looking at the renderings of what this project will look like. And just everybody was so excited that, you know, we've got this recognition from USA Today that we are the number one convention city in North America, which is a great honor. And they did, but that happened way back in 2014. Now, the good news for Indy is they've never updated that survey. So we've been number one since 2014 with no challenges, and I hope they never do because no way to go but down. But we also were going to rest on our laurels. And so that's just one example of some development right now, this convention center expansion. In the signal by Hilton, we're also expanding our downtown. We have a park called White River State park that is right downtown Indianapolis. It's 250 acres, and it's expanding by another ten to 15 acres. And it's going to have riverfront access. And it's directly across the river, on the west bank of that river from the downtown convention district. That's another example of a major project. We're developing a whole bunch of things along our white river, which is the river

that runs through downtown Indy. Those who might listen to this podcast who are from Europe may find this to be an absurd comparison, but I remind people all the time, because when I came from, I, having come from San Francisco, I used to get reminded all the time the first couple of years I was here. Hey, you know, Indy doesn't have a golden gate bridge and oceans and mountains and by the, you know, the Pacific and et cetera, et cetera, it's a flat city with a river. I said, well, you know, it's got a flat city with a river and does just fine is Paris. And there's a lot of European cities like that, right, that are basically flat cities with rivers. They don't have oceans, they don't have mountains. There's nothing geographically or topographically particularly interesting about them. But, you know, a city like Paris has made a place for itself. They've placed place making through culture, through building of attractions, the Louvre and the Eiffel Tower. And, you know, Indy is not Paris. They have a 2000 year head start on us. But you know, they were founded BC, we were founded in 1820. So there's going to be a little advantage here. But I look at places like Orlando or Las Vegas. 100 years ago. Las Vegas had a population of 3400 people. Orlando had a population of 9400 people. Orlando was a swamp. Vegas was a desert. I look at Singapore. Singapore in 1965 was a sleepy fishing village that belonged to 1963, I should say, and belong to the, the United Kingdom. They were, they were colony of the United Kingdom. And you look at Singapore today, what they've done in the last 15 years at Marina Bay, building the Marina Bay sands and gardens by the bay. They did that just since 2007. And so it's a reminder, you know, going back to your original question about what am I excited about in Indy? Well, we're, we're really being very intentional and aggressive in our place making. And you don't have to have oceans and mountains. You can create your own path if you have the will and desire to do it. Like a Singapore, an Orlando, a Vegas and hopefully in Indy.

[18:07] **Magdalena Atanassova:** That's awesome. And I loved your comparison. I mean, you don't have to have this 2000 year head start to be a great destination for sure.

[18:17] **Leonard Hoops:** Absolutely. I bet you Sophia, Bulgaria is beautiful. I need to come visit sometime.

[18:21] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Yeah, we're also kind of old city, but I don't think we compared to Indy at the same time, you know. So there you go.

[18:29] **Leonard Hoops:** We all have our strengths.

[18:31] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Yeah, exactly. Just switching gears a little bit. I know that you're very passionate about diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging, and you're using your voice for change. So can you share how you see accessibility becoming more of a priority in your destination?

[18:50] **Leonard Hoops:** Well, you know, PCMA has been in the forefront of this for a long time with ascent. And that was really meant initially to elevate women in our industry, to provide, to recognize women, to provide more opportunity. Break that glass ceiling. I mean, frankly, our industry is particularly on the business event strategy side, dominated by women, and yet women, as a collective word, getting their due. And so PCMA worked to elevate that. That said, having been in the industry for many years and not just working with PCMA, but with the US Travel board of directors, with the destinations International board of directors and organizations like that, I found that DEI, or as we do it in indie DEIB, with the belonging, tended, in my opinion, to be almost exclusively focused on race, ethnicity and gender and sexual orientation and sexual identity. And so, you know, so it was men and women, it was black and white, it was LGBTQ there was very little from my perspective as it related to accessibility and inclusion for those with physical and or cognitive challenges. And this is near and dear to my heart because I have a 19 year old son with cerebral palsy. My son Cannon had a birth injury when he was born. I almost didn't make it. He was in a medically induced coma the first ten days of his life, and today he's 19. And just yesterday on social media, I posted a photo of him holding a certificate, noting that he had made the dean's list for his high school. So he, you know, he's a little older than his high school classmates because we started him a little later, we weren't sure how he would fully integrate into the regular school system because a lot of kids with his condition, a cerebral palsy, brain injury, a related condition, wind up either in special classes or special schools. But my boy ended up being. We were very fortunate. He got mainstreamed. He was able to handle it, and he's not only been able to handle it, he's been able to. To get on the dean's list. So one of the things that struck me, though, last week in Singapore for PCMA, I was at the Asia Pacific, the business of events a week, which was a wonderful conference, PCMA and Flo Chua and her team, and did just an incredible job, I feel, drawing people from all over Asia Pacific. I mean, there were Australians and Kiwis and obviously Singapore, insignificance, Hong Kong, some from China. And so, you know, it was really great to see that such a broad region. But while I was there, I ended up convincing my family that she'd go with me. Pulled our kids out of school, because how often do you get a chance to have the whole family go to Singapore? So when the conferences wrapped up, we started taking the metro around Singapore. And the metro is terrific. The stations are very accessible elevators. The trains have got spots. They're very conscientious about people with accessibility challenges using the

metro. But once we got to Little India, because I'm half Indian, I'm half east Indian, I'm half English, Scottish. Iris had a very white dad and a very brown mom, and we wanted to go to Little India, and my mom was with us as well, and she's nearly 80 and having some mobility issues. But I found, you know, the older part of Singapore that, like, a Little India was very difficult to. To get around on. With my boy in his chair and my mom, who's mobile, but not, well, mobile, it was really tough to navigate those streets and it reminds me that there's just so much work. I mean, again, like old Europe has wonderful, wonderful charms. But one of the challenges of old Europe is accessibility. The infrastructure was just, wasn't designed for it. It's very difficult and expensive to do it. But in general, I think in our industry, we need to be thinking about everybody with differing needs. I like to call it diverse ability. Right. So we have diverse abilities and they're different. But, you know, we should be aware of what somebody in a wheelchair needs at a meeting when somebody who's got hearing loss or vision loss has at a meeting with somebody who's got, who's somewhere on an autism spectrum or any sort of cognitive neurodevelopment challenge. And I think we've done that in a very, I think, again, PCMA with ascent has been at the forefront relative to the industry. But even being at the forefront relative to the industry, we're barely scratching the surface on that aspect of DEIB.

[23:12] **Magdalina Atanassova:** I agree with you. There's still a lot of work to be done in general. Also, just recently I had an interview together with Jen Dienst on the convene team with Paula Brantner on harassment and the issue of harassment not only in the industry, but events and how it's, you know, how can people be more protected from different types of harassment? So really it was very insightful conversation that will release soon, and it really needs to be yet another standard that we have to develop in the industry.

[23:48] **Leonard Hoops:** So I think the inclusion part, whether it's accessibility, harassment, that is kind of the part of DEIB. Well, DEI, and again, we've added B at PCMA because obviously we are a community and we want people to feel like they belong. But that in that B. And DEIB is really, I think, the next step for a lot of organizations, whether it's a Visit Indy or PCMA or any industry association. Yeah.

[24:16] **Magdalina Atanassova:** And you have a good opportunity now with all the developments that you're creating and you're investing in the destination to be mindful of making them more accessible. Right.

[24:25] **Leonard Hoops:** Yeah. That's built into the design of our convention center expansion and our signify Hilton. Certainly when you do a new build, you have opportunities to do things with hundreds of years of knowledge of what should be done rather than what has been done.

[24:40] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Yeah. And there you go. The plus of being in your destination, not 2000 years old.

[24:47] **Leonard Hoops:** Yeah. Yeah. That's a good point. There's some advantages to being a 200 year destination rather than a 2000 year one.

[24:52] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Yeah. You have started on a year of strategic growth at PCMA and Visit Indy. How did it look like for you?

[25:00] **Leonard Hoops:** So the exponential growth strategy that we've talked about at PCMA, back at convening leaders on stage here, Desiree talked about it, she talked about it. I talked about it. That has really been in the works since I was first on the board in 2017. So I first got on the PCMA board from 2017 to 2020. And during that term is when we started talking about growing our membership and our engaged audience far greater than where it was, so that we could ensure the PCMA would remain the platform for the business events industry and go beyond just an impact. Right now, we're doing a lot of talking amongst ourselves, but I think your vision and the vision of the board and the staff at PCMA is that PCMA's influences felt well beyond our little bubble that we exist in, that people understand the impact of events globally and how it's so vital to moving the world forward, both socially and economically. And so from 17 to 20, we made progress, but we didn't get it over the finish line. Then when I was nominated to be back on the executive committee, in fact, it was Greg Odell a couple of years ago who had been in my last year on the board, the first term was the chair. And so, Greg, I remember about a week before the deadline to file, you know, to submit your references and fill out all these things that PCMA has you go through to get on the board. He texts me and he says, hey, I just nominated you for secretary treasurer. And I'm like, that's great. I wish you'd have done that like a month ago. And now I'm scrambling for references and things. But it all obviously all happened. I got back on the board and I was surprised to learn when I got back on the board that we were still talking about exponential growth. I'm like, hey, I was on the board for three years. I was offered two, and we still haven't done anything beyond talk about this. And so in the three years that I've been back as secretary treasurer, as chair elect, and now as chair, we did take that step, right? We got commitments from our board to move it forward. We started plotting out what that would look like. A lot of people in the industry know our good friend Oscar from MCI. He's helped us with what that

should look like. Unbelievable strategic mind and research he's done and then facilitated exploration with our board to see what that might look like. And that has ultimately led our group to say, hey, right now, our collective community is a little over 8000 people close to 8400 that are members, and then there's an engaged audience of somewhere between 40 and 50,000 people. What does an engaged audience mean? It means that somebody who is in some way shape or form touching PCMA or PCMA, stucing them with education, with going to events, with online training, with certification, with subscribing to convene, you name it. So somewhere shaper form, 40 to 50,000 people are engaged. We want to grow that 8400 members to 25,000 and that 40 to 50,000 that are engaged to 300,000. And that may sound crazy, but when Oscar digs you through the data and you see globally how many people, in particular in Europe and Asia and Latin America who are involved in some way, you can't perform in this industry and are not engaged with us. There's huge growth internationally. There's also more growth than you would expect within North America. While we have clearly the vast majority of our membership and engaged audiences in North America, there is still a lot that has not been, we've not brought into the PCMA world. So I think I'm very excited on the PCMA side to that. We're now in year two of this exponential growth strategy. Desiree got it off the ground and did a beautiful job taking it past the start line. I just think about it as a relay race, you know, Desiree ran the first lap, had to be the baton. I'm taking the baton for the second lap, and we've got laps to go all the way to 2030. The goal is by the end of 2030, we had that 25,000 members and that 300,000 engaged community.

[28:55] **Magdalina Atanassova:** There's a few laps to be taken yet.

[28:58] **Leonard Hoops:** I hope that Neil and Kelly are exercising because they've got laps three and four.

[29:04] **Magdalina Atanassova:** I'm sure they are, especially after listening to you. They're going on the track. To be honest with you, I saw a post on LinkedIn that really stood out to me. You posted this quote from, I hope I pronounced it right, Steve Prefontaine.

[29:22] **Leonard Hoops:** Yeah, Steve Prefontaine was a, was a long distance runner in the United States. There you go.

[29:28] **Magdalina Atanassova:** I made the reference without even knowing it. And the whole quote, for those who don't know it, is no matter how hard you train, somebody will train harder. No matter how hard you run, somebody will run harder. No matter how hard you want it, somebody will want it more. I am somebody that speaks for me for this continued drive and determination, and I see that in your whole career and your like everything that you do, but how do you find balance in, in this continued, you know, race that you're running?

[30:05] **Leonard Hoops:** Yeah, that's such a great quote, right? I mean the whole point of somebody wants it more. And then Steve Prefontaine said, I am somebody, you know, so he said he was basically letting the world know he's the guy that was going to outwork you and outran you. And I think all of us need to have that attitude. If you really particularly in, I should take this back. We don't all have to have that attitude, but if you're willing to accept a leadership opportunity like being the chair of PCMA or being the CEO of visit Indie, not everybody wants to do stuff like that. But those who do ought to have that attitude. From my perspective of being that somebody, of wanting it so much that you are the person that everybody else says, okay, I see why that person did that role and believe that they're going to take us forward. Balance is a tricky question. I mean, my wife Doreen, right now, I think, thinks that she's basically a single mom with three kids and we only have two kids. So it's my two kids and me because I'm gone a lot, you know. Perfect example is the last two weeks. Now the good news was in one of these weeks they actually did go with me. But most of these trips, I'll be at IMEX and Frankfurt as the PCMA chair, and they won't be with me for that one. Most of them they won't. So I'll be gone for another week. But like the last two weeks, I was a business events industry week in DC. We had the solar eclipse in Indianapolis that day at a little after 03:00 p.m. eastern time zone in the US. And as soon as that eclipse had done its full totality, 15 minutes later, I was in my car driving to the airport, park at the airport, hop on a flight to DC, go to a PCMA partner dinner that night. The next morning we had our PCMA board meeting. We have two board meetings. Generally when the PCMA board convenes, one is a business meeting and one's more of a strategic meeting. And so we had the business meeting on the Tuesday morning. That afternoon we spent with the PCMA partners and chapter leaders. Then on the Wednesday we had the fashion show and the destination showcase. Then on the Thursday we had visionary awards and a second PCMA board meeting, which was the strategic meeting. Then that Friday I flew home. I was in Indy for two and a half hours, 1 hour I spent at the office, one and a half hours I spent back at my condo packing my bags for Singapore with the family, and then headed to the airport again and flew to Singapore and then flew to San Francisco that night, spent the night in San Francisco and then that morning, that Saturday morning. Now that's Friday, when I left DC Saturday morning. Now in San Francisco, I'm flying to Singapore. And of course Singapore, for everybody who'd made that trip, can be 16 to 18 hours even

just from the west coast. You landed in Singapore? I left at 11:00 a.m. on Saturday morning. I landed at about 07:00 at night on Sunday night. And 90 minutes after I landed, I was at a dinner with sheriff and a couple of other colleagues from the industry, Michelle Mason, who runs Asae, and Amy, who runs one of the industry associations as well. And I'm trying to think there was another person or two there. Steve Johnson, who's from destination DC, was there. Peter O'Neill from the PCMA board, who runs an association was there. And so it was a terrific flurry of activity. But boy, that ain't a whole lot of balance. And so the good news was, because we got there on a Sunday night and I went right to a dinner, I went right into sleep mode and really got acclimated to the twelve time zone difference pretty quickly. And then Monday, Tuesday was PCMA, APAC, business of events. Wednesday there was another meeting, the sheriff and I and a couple of others from that us delegation. We were North Star meetings, Asia Pacific Conference. And then finally Thursday, Friday, I did two vacation days while there. And then Saturday we flew right home again. And then, you know, flew home on another 16 plus hour flight, got to SFO, took a red eye to O'Hare in Chicago, took the O'Hare flight back to Indy, got home maybe 11:00 a.m. on the Sunday morning. And now I'm about five days past that, and I feel I'm back into the right time zone. But in two plus weeks I'll be again in Frankfurt. So I would say that this is not sustainable if you did this every year. So I guess the short answer to the long answer I've given you, Maggie, to this thing of, this idea of balance is I don't know that you have it as the chair of PCMA. If you're in a full time job like a Visit Indy, which is of itself as easily a 60 hours week type of job, and then you want to accept the responsibility and the opportunity and the privilege of being the PCMA chair, knowing that that's going to be another ten to 30 hours a week. There's going to be some weeks. It's 90 hours. Is that sustainable for more than a year? Probably not. Can you do that for a year? I think you can do that for a year, right? Can I have somebody run a marathon every day? No, but can you run a marathon if you train for it every once in a while? Of course. And so I think I can do this unbalanced marathon for a year, but I will be. And I've heard this from Charles Starks and I've heard this from Desiree and others who have been chair of the board, that the year goes by quickly because you don't have any balance and then you get back to your normal life.

[35:13] **Magdalena Atanassova:** I want to ask you something connected to that, because, you know, in the past few seasons of the coming podcast, I've interviewed younger professionals that they're just starting in the industry, and they're, you know, they're engaged with PCME and other organizations in the industry. They're looking up at such opportunities, but at the same time, you know, they're a bit more oriented to having, balancing their life and to have a bit more time to be able to even digest such things happening. So do you feel that our industry, I don't want to point fingers at PCMA or other organizations, but do you feel there is going to be change in how we do these things, running associations, because that's a voluntary position. You're not getting paid for 90 hours a week on top of your regular job, which is stressful enough. So do you feel there will be change coming to attract this younger generation that now is stepping into the industry?

[36:16] **Leonard Hoops:** So the easy answer to that, it's a great question, is yes and no. Yes in the sense that have there been some paradigm shifts culturally, particularly with the pandemic accelerating it? Because even to Visit Indy, we were already one day a week work from home, and people could pick that day. I think. I think pre pandemic, we were one day a weekend. It could be any day except for Monday or Friday. So it was a Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday. But we wanted people in on Mondays. We wanted people in Fridays and not turning it into a kind of a long weekend, etcetera. Well, the pandemic, of course, we were all home for five days a week for some time. And then when we came back out of it, there were a lot of people who supposedly something like 21 days to develop a habit or something like that. Well, we all had way more than 21 days to develop this habit of working from home. And for some people, anything that was different moving forward was not acceptable to them. And others, you know, there were others who were kind of digging in their heels and saying, I want everybody back in the office five days a week. I think realistically that culturally, globally, you're looking at one, two or more flexible days where you could be out of the office and still get your job done. I think the real key is much, certainly for Visit Indy it is. And PCMA has operated with a staff that has been spread out all over the world, you know, the headquarters in Chicago. I don't know what percentage of the overall team is in the office on a regular day, but it's not a huge percentage. Right, because you already have people that aren't based there and then you have people who are based there who have, you know, the ability to be more flexible twice a week. So the yes is that there has been a paradigm shift. There are people looking for balance in general. The no is that the human condition is such and, you know, we're hundreds of thousands, if not millions of years as a species. I don't know my anthropology well enough to have the answer to that, but I know it's hundreds of thousands for sure that the human condition is such that people who want to achieve more are going to end up not having that great of a balance. And finding this, you know, that is just the nature of the human being where, you know, it goes back to the Steve Prefontaine quote at some

point, the people who want the balance in the world, if that makes them happy, great. I'm all for that. And my team at Visit Indy, 58 people. We have a mix of people who are, who are not looking to be working 60 hours a week, and I have no issue with that. But there are also people who are going to want to do that and who are looking to move up and whether it's at Visit Indy or somewhere else within the industry in their career. And you can't kind of have it both ways. A lot of, you know, if there's some part of your team that is kind of putting in the extra and they want to move up, you're going to notice that as the CEO relative to somebody who is like, I'm eight to five and I'm taking, you know, I'm traveling when I want to travel, et cetera, et cetera. You can't always have it both ways. So I fully support and want to empower those who want to have that balance, because I think that's great. And, you know, I was reading something on Apple News recently. They, you know, they have all these different articles on you can get on the iPad. And one of them was about asking people where the class valedictorian had wound up, you know, so at their high school, and I don't know if they use that same term in Europe, but basically, you know, the top student in your school and in many cases that top student, you know, went to some Ivy League college, Stanford or Harvard, Stanford not being Ivy League, but comparable. And they went on to be a doctor, or they went on to be a rocket scientist for NASA or this, that one of the examples that somebody wrote was their valedictorian had moved to Mexico and was selling fruit on the beach and they were happy. So, you know what? If that makes that person happy, even if they were valedictorian, more power to that person. Sell fruit on the beach. If you're living your best life that way, great. If other people felt like the only way they could live their best life was to help launch a rocket to Mars, then do that, too. So the short answer, the long answer is yes and no. Yes. There has been a paradigm shift. Yes. I think we're seeing more people with flexible work scheduled, more organizations open to that, as long as we get the job done. But the human condition, no, we're just wired in a way as a species that people, there are going to be people who are prefontaine, that are somebody, and that somebody is going to come for that next opportunity.

[40:37] **Magdalena Atanassova:** I like that. Was there anything we didn't address and we should have wrapping the conversation up?

[40:42] **Leonard Hoops:** No, I've enjoyed. This has been delightful. Maggie, chatting with you. It just shows you, I think, about how we were just getting trained on teams at visit Indie in February of 2020 and video conferencing and things like that. Zoom has been around since prior to the pandemic, but it wasn't widely adopted. There was like Webex with Cisco and things like that. Yeah, it was sort of a novelty, right? So a lot of us were. Now, I think I should say that was definitely a novelty in the US. I think internationally there are people, maybe you are an example of that, that were already more leaning into that because you had to, you know, they say that invention, necessity is the mother of invention, I think is one of those. I don't know if it's an Edison quote or somebody said that, but the gist of it is, if you need something, you're going to create it. So there were people who I think, particularly in Europe and maybe Asia, who were already adopting it more extensively than the US, but the pandemic accelerated that. And now we get to have conversations like this where it's late afternoon in Bulgaria and it's mid morning in Indianapolis and we're getting the chat, and then you're going to distribute this and a whole bunch of people all over the world at their convenience, whenever they feel like listen to it, we'll listen to it. I will say this. I would love to hear from anybody who does listen to this. If they have any comments, feedback, questions, I put that out there on the stage. You can meeting leaders and people have definitely taken me up on it. When I was at the business events industry week, there was kind of a fireside chat at lunchtime on the Tuesday with me and sheriff. And I put it out there to say, if I haven't met you, if you're a chapter leader, your partner, whatever it is, if I haven't met you, I would love for you to say hi. And a whole bunch of people took me up on that offer over the next couple of days and said hi. You know, come in where it said, hey, you said to say hi. So I'm saying hi, I'm Bob, or I'm Mary. And I loved it. So anybody who's listening to this, I would love for them. I have a fairly simple email. It's LHoops@VisitIndy.com. Send me an email. I would love to hear from you. Send me a financial request on LinkedIn. You know this, we're already four months into my year as the chair. A third of the year done. And it went by in the blink of an eye, just as it was, as Charles and Desiree and other, Greg Odell and Claire Smith have all told me, that it will go by in a blink of an eye. So I guess that's the only thing I would add, is that I would love to hear from others who do listen to this with your feedback, your comments, would love to meet you, would love to know about your PCMA journey. And I appreciate anybody who has listened to this because that means they are part of this engaged community, whether you're a member or not a member, that we are looking to grow to be so impactful that we're really going to make a difference in the world.

[43:21] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Thank you. I think you have such an inspiring story and the fact that you're so open to listening to others and help them on their journey. I think it's very important, especially for the younger generation that are looking up to people like yourself. So I hope they will be

the ones that we'll take you up on your offer and we'll, you know, shoot an email, connect on social media with you and ask for your advice and, you know, help them, help them grow, because we need more young people in our industry.

[43:55] **Leonard Hoops:** Well, and I think that I was born into a situation. You know, you're, you can't choose your circumstances that you come into this world. And in my particular case, I had an English, Scottish, Irish from an ethnicity, American father from a nationality, and this east Indian mother from an ethnicity, born in Trinidad from a nationality. And so I joked this year, if, you know, when he was like, hey, you're the first DMO person to be the chair. I said, I'm also pretty much, I'm pretty sure I'm the first DMO. I'm the first person born in Trinidad to be the chair. I'm probably also the first English, Scottish, Irish, Indian American to be chair. Right. Because the circumstances are such. But that growing up as, as a kid who didn't look like other kids, it opened my eyes and ears to different stories and different perspectives. And I probably grown up Americans, in my opinion as a whole, are often, we get a little nationalistic, and our eyes and areas are not as open to the planet as we should be. I think, I mean, criticism of myself as an American, collectively, as a group, plenty great people who are well traveled and know the world, but as a whole, we're not. We don't know geography very well. We don't know how other cultures do things well. And so it's such a blessing and a privilege in this PCMA chair role. When I was at my San Francisco job, I had dozen or 13, I can't remember the exact number, international offices. We had offices in Beijing and Shanghai and Seoul and Tokyo and Paris and Rome and Sydney. And so I had opportunities in that job to travel the world. And one morning you're in Seoul saying *hello in Korean* and you try to learn maybe 20 phrases, and then the next morning you're in Beijing or Shanghai, its *hello in Mandarin*. Then the next morning you're in Tokyo and it's *hello in Japanese*, and, you know, and you realize that even within Asian cultures, you know, we kind of lump them together. And you're like, Seoul is so different. You know, South Korea is so different than Beijing, and Shanghai could not be any different, right? I mean, you want the capital of China and kind of its Las Vegas of China could not be any more different than the two cities could be. And, you know, so you get these global experiences, and I think PCMA helps facilitate and or accelerate that. If you're one of those somebodies that Prefontaine talks about that, you know, if you, if you, if you want that opportunity, PCMA is definitely a pathway to help you find those opportunities to become a global person. And, you know, you can be proud of your own ethnicity and your own nationality, but we're all at this, the end of the day, citizens of this earth.

[46:28] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Yeah. Well, so let's wrap with that because that was a great end to this conversation. Thank you so much for making time. I really appreciate it.

[46:38] **Leonard Hoops:** Thank you for having me, Maggie. It's a great pleasure and honor. Thanks.

[46:41] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Thank you. If you enjoyed this episode, do give us a five star review and subscribe wherever you listen to podcasts. For more industry insights, visit pcma.org/convene. Until next time.