

Convene Podcast Transcript

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

[00:04] **Magdalena Atanassova:** This is the Convene Podcast. My name is Maggie, Digital Media Editor. Hi, and welcome to the Convene Podcast. Well, a little surprise for you. We are here on site and this time we're going to do our usual Convene talk, but this time, from Convening leaders directly to you, I'm here with the Convene team. So thank you so much again. So what stood out to you? What's the first thing that comes to mind? Barbara, I see you're ready to speak.

[00:40] **Barbara Palmer:** You know, what stood out to me most is just all the energy here. I just took a tour of the district, which is where the activations are, and they are analyzing the energy in there with technology, and they said it was the highest it's ever been and that most business events are at a certain level and this is up above that. So I guess energy would be the first thing that I noticed.

[01:14] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Well, for me, it's actually emotion. It has been an emotional journey somehow. We started this Sunday with Scott Galloway and he has his way of provoking emotions.

[01:27] **Barbara Palmer:** Yes.

[01:28] **Magdalena Atanassova:** But then we had yesterday, Brene Brown, and she really. Well, she really did what she usually does. She was very real, very authentic, and she really made me personally think about a lot of things, you, the grand scheme of life and also work. And today, actually, I attended another session which was about negotiations. And somehow I still was very emotional at the end because the speaker, Alex Carter, she did an amazing job, not only explaining how can we negotiate better, but she put in a personal story that was very touching. And, yeah, that really made me emotional. Jen, what about you?

[02:09] **Jen Dienst:** I feel the same. Yeah, Brene Brown was incredible. I think everyone kind of walked away feeling something. I definitely did. I noticed that too, just on social media. I've just been kind of keeping an eye on what people are saying and doing on Instagram and it seems like everyone else felt that way too. But, yeah, I had a. I really enjoyed that session. I enjoyed a session this morning about DEI's impact on legislation here in the United States and kind of what that means for destinations and organizations meetings in the next year. And that was a packed session and I really enjoyed hearing from some of the speakers. And I felt like, you know, there was definitely some emotion there too. You know, it's. It's a charged topic, but it sounds like there's some really interesting research coming out I think that we're going to dig into. So I'm really looking forward to getting into that and hearing more about that topic because it's really important what about you, Michelle, we haven't heard from you yet.

[03:10] **Michelle Russell:** Thanks, Jen. You know, what I loved was not just what Brene Brown said, but the way she says it. So she seems to me to be like the master of the powerful pause, but not in a forced way where somebody is doing it just to have you listen to what's coming next. You could just see. I think about the way she was doing it is a lot like when I see my 4 year old granddaughter about to say something, you could see the wheels turning. So she would respond to a question and she took her time and it was okay. Like I didn't see anybody squirm in their seats thinking that she didn't know how to respond. We were all just like waiting to hear really what she thought and it was meaningful. So I really took away from her conversation just how masterful she is at conversing with people and the power of looking in people's eyes. And Barbara, you talked about this. It was the first thing you asked us when we were here in sight. And I haven't been, we haven't been together for a while in person, but just being at an in person event and how, whether we noticed how people were looking in each other's eyes when we're used to just talking to each other through the screen. So I, I'll let you talk about that.

[04:34] **Barbara Palmer:** Yeah. Well, I went to Seattle for four days and I was meeting a lot of people who are very passionate about what they were doing. I, it was just so wonderful to look into so many people's eyes consistently throughout the day. You know, I think there's, there's just a lot that we don't know about what, what's communicated that way. So just, and talking about Renee Brown just coming up the elevator after, I guess we were all in an open space, but somebody on the elevator, she started out saying she liked my shoes and somehow we ended up in the fact that she lost her job less than a week ago and she debated whether she should come here and you know, she just thought, I don't know if I want to go now. And she was so glad that she did and she was connecting with so many people. So it was just kind of a, just a reminder about how many conversations are available around you all the time at places like this.

[05:44] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Yeah, I really like what you were saying, that they're available and I see that and I think we all see it walking around, just all the hugs, the connections, you know, the

small talk that like you say you start from, well, nice shoes and then you end up in a really deep conversation, which is amazing. And that's the power of events. And we heard it from quite a few of our speakers so far how important the job of event planners is, especially nowadays when we're really struggling with connecting in our personal lives. Like, Michelle, you said this little oasis, I think it was in the last cover story, right, the little oasis where you come to recharge and refill your batteries. And I noticed that quite a bit. And I also feel myself recharged. So I was also very happy to be surrounded by so many people. I had wonderful conversations here also. You know, we're recording ahead the podcast, and I just found out I missed the session that I really was supposed to go to. There was a great research that I wanted to bring up. So the American Psychological association and the Australian Psychological Society came together and they created this guide for our industry on how to design for neurodivergent individuals. And they used, you know, their network, so they used psychologists, they used event planners. So they tried to cover all the cases and create this guide which they are sharing for free so everybody can find it. And when we release this Friday, the podcast on our platform, I'll link to that guide so everybody can download it. And they see it as a free, and not only free, but a living document. So it is going to be open to anyone who downloads it to read it and say, okay, I don't think that's actually correct. They can reach out to any of the associations and that would get corrected. So that's how they want to. To make something that's meaningful and useful for our industry, but also backed by science. And Paula Rowntree, that was on the podcast, she was saying that especially now with AI and all the influencers out there, we get a lot of information that's not necessarily correct. So that's why the associations came together and they joined hands and they decided to just do this and be backed by science. And it's not only something that people thought it would be okay to share, but something that was actually useful and good. So I really, I was very sad to understand that I've missed that session, but at least the resources are out there and shared with the industry.

[08:29] **Barbara Palmer:** Just on that topic of neurodiversity, one of the most packed sessions I went to was about the title was Neurodiversity as a Superpower. And it was about anxiety, depression and ADHD. And the 1 of the speakers started out by saying, would you ever have imagined that at a meeting like this, the room would be filled with people and we would be talking so openly about the stresses on our jobs and as well as the different ways that we process things and the different ways we do things. And it was a very open, transparent conversation. And nobody left, like, at the end. I don't know if they finally had to gently shoo people out because people were, you know, they were talking to the speakers, but also talking to each other. And the big takeaway from that, the through line through every speaker, was support networks that if you can, you know, just to get support, then don't try and go it alone and find others that you can talk to. And I think this was also. Brene Brown talked about boundaries. She talked about vulnerability, but she also talked about boundaries. And they were saying people that are. It's safe that you can go to for help with those problems. And there might be other organizations or people where it's not. So I thought it was pretty remarkable that we are having these conversations so openly.

[10:02] **Jen Dienst:** I thought it was interesting too, how we had. I mean, this was the first thing that we saw when we got here were the sensory kits that we. We opened and we looked at. It was so well done. It was so well put together. I'm not sure of all the different objects in there. I only got to glance at it, but that was available for attendees. And then also that we have a quiet space, which I pass by on our way to our office every day. And I'm tempted to go in there and just hang out for a little bit of quiet. But I love that we have those things. And I. Correct me if I'm wrong. Isn't that the first time that we've had those sensory kits?

[10:38] **Magdalena Atanassova:** I'm not sure. Yeah, but I think so.

[10:40] **Jen Dienst:** Okay. Yeah, it's cool. I feel like that's a. That's a cool thing to have at the meeting.

[10:44] **Magdalena Atanassova:** But yeah, there were a lot of little things you can. It's like a fidgety things you can just play with. There was an open box this morning at registration, so I just want to play a little bit with it. But it's really cool. It's kind of. It calms you down. And I like that they have also earplugs, which don't necessarily block out everything you can still hear, but they just minimize the noise. And I personally, I have the same. And I. I have them with me at events because sometimes it's just too much. It's just too loud and the music is too much and all the cheater chatter Networking, reception. Sometimes it's just too much. And these are great. You can still have a conversation, but you're just not that overwhelmed by the noise. So it's awesome.

[11:30] **Barbara Palmer:** Can I just mention, also, another really packed session was on budgets and people trying to figure out how they're just going to rein in costs. And I don't, you know, nobody really had a silver bullet, as they say. But again, just the getting together and sharing best practices and learning from each other. There was a panel and then there was like a little group of like seven people

that were like, you know, their own little panel after the meeting, just sharing, like, oh, I did this and I did that. And I know that you went to something this morning you were telling us about.

[12:06] **Michelle Russell:** Yes. So this gave me, like, a newfound respect for medical meeting planners who have international attendees. So, you know, in convene, we try to talk about topics that would be of interest to all meeting planners. Corporate, independent, medical. But I learned that there are some things that even though they know that these are trends, that medical meeting planners know that their attendees want more networking time, for instance, but they can't do that because of the rules, the med tech rules, which is that they have to have six hours of programming a day and networking doesn't qualify. And she said this is really a challenge because their attendees really want to have that time to network and talk to each other, and yet they can't in order to attend. They just can't have that in the program. And just things like having music, which we've been hearing a bagpipe playing behind us, just having music is not allowed because it's considered entertainment. So you couldn't have music before a session. So just things that you think are universal are really a challenge for them. And it just gave me this newfound respect for medical meeting planners that they have all of these rules. And even CME is changing and becoming a lot more stringent, which makes it even more challenging. So I just sat back. I was just listening to five or six of them talk, and I was just so impressed by the knowledge that they were sharing with each other and how. How difficult their job is.

[13:48] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Yeah. And it's not only the. The fact that you can't have such things, but it's also the placement of certain things. I remember that from years ago. It may have changed, but for example, where you put a coffee station versus where, for example, a sponsor has a display, they have to be a certain, you know, that many feet apart and things like that. So. So it's, wow, you have to be really into the details.

[14:16] **Michelle Russell:** She was saying, for instance, like sitting in our room, she could see a logo, a sponsor logo in the hallway. Not allowed. You can't see the sponsor logo anywhere near a session room. It could be in the hallway where it's out of, you know, eyesight. But just the little things, all these things that you need to know. It's mind boggling.

[14:37] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Yeah, definitely. And I wanted to bring up Scott Galloway and Jen, I'm coming to you because, well, you wrote a story right after he spoke. So what stood out to you when it comes to Scott Galloway?

[14:54] **Jen Dienst:** Sure. So I think what stood out to me is, I mean, obviously anyone who listens to him or listened to this particular session, AI really just kind of stole the show, to no surprise. He touched on that a lot, I think, and this is something that I wrote about in another story. But he talked about how AI is really going to, when it comes to like marketing and consumer choice, AI is really going to change that. And he gave the example of finding a hotel for, you know, any conference that he goes to. And instead of going to an OTA like Expedia or just doing like a random Google search, he just skips over all of that and goes straight to, you know, something like TikTok and types in basically keywords, you know, that kind of match to what he's looking for. Whatever aesthetic he's aspiring to, which, you know, he was joking, a middle aged man trying to be cool or whatever it was, I forget what he said. And that gives him the result that he wants, specifically one or two results, not a million results, which is what we got from Google or an OTA. And I thought that was really, really on point. That's the way I travel personally. Now if I'm looking, you know, for, for, you know, if I'm going somewhere new and I want to know what the, where the locals are or, you know, where other people are traveling and because you can kind of get a sense of who they are from their profiles and from the content that they're putting out. He also touched on that the influencer, they're the new kind of like power broker in this space and that's what people are going to be looking to more and more. But yeah, he touched on that. I thought that was really interesting and I think the overlap with, you know, business events really comes into play is, you know, hotels and, you know, all the other, all the other elements that attendees are looking for, where are they going to go to book those things. And I think in the story I wrote previously, I found a study that pointed to even business travelers are going to be using AI more to find those hotel recommendations. So something for planners to keep in mind and think about, especially when it comes to room blocks. What else? I think Galloway had a lot of interesting insights when it comes to, you know, just what's going on politically and also just other topics. What kind of caught your attention with Galloway?

[17:20] **Barbara Palmer:** You know, same. Same. When you were talking, what I was thinking about when you talked about AI Stole the show is I feel like AI is so much more present at this meeting that I feel like, you know, the last couple of conferences, Educon and the last convening leaders, it was kind of like a little, maybe like, like a side group that was interested in it, but it just seems like it's, it's, you know, you see that it's more mainstream and that people are less curious about AI and more curious about their ability to use it and how they'll use it and feeling they're just not. They're not afraid of it. They, like, know that it's.

[18:13] **Jen Dienst:** They want to know how it can work for them versus just, oh, it's this weird new technology that's kind of scary.

[18:20] **Michelle Russell:** Yeah.

[18:21] **Barbara Palmer:** Yeah. I think that's really exciting to see that.

[18:25] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Barbara, while you have the mic, what about Kishore Mahbubani?

[18:30] **Barbara Palmer:** You know, a lot of what he had to say about the transfer of power and the ability to, you know, just the political shifts were new to me when I spoke to him, and I thought it was really fascinating. His memoir is just great reading. And, you know, the point that he made is that it's not that the United States and Europe and the west is in decline from his point of view, but it is that Asia has regained the dominance that it had for centuries before modern history. And, you know, it's a really good lesson about. It's very applicable to a lot of things that you just, you think, you know, you think you're keeping up, but then you're like, oh, I'm keeping up with things through this lens. So it's a really good reminder to, like, open your lens up a little bit.

[19:39] **Magdalena Atanassova:** And Michelle, want to switch a bit. And looking forward today.

[19:43] **Michelle Russell:** Yes, I was going to say. So we have Liz Cheney, which I'm excited to hear from, and tomorrow Amal Clooney. So there's still plenty to come. And just, I just love going out there and seeing old friends and meeting new people. I think there's just a great dynamic here. Being in person matters.

[20:02] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Yeah. What do you expect to hear from Liz Cheney?

[20:06] **Michelle Russell:** I already respect the woman because she really sacrificed her career to follow her values. And I'm hoping to hear really more about how she did that and how she had the resolve to do that. It's very difficult to stand for what you believe in when other people are not necessarily doing the same.

[20:28] **Barbara Palmer:** Burma, just a comment on just something that's adjacent to that is that. And also about shifts is that the security has had to be really tight here and it's not something that people are used to really. The tradition has been to bring your laptop in so you can maybe take notes or catch up on emails in the back row and, you know, carry your desk around with you all day and put it under your chair. And so that's been. That's been like. It's challenging to see that balance, like trying to keep security and keep things safe and respect, you know, the traditions and how it demands that people change how they do things a little bit. And that's never easy to change.

[21:24] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Oh, yeah, I'm sure the audience has seen that, the discussion about that. It's not easy, but it's necessary, especially in this day and age that we all live. And we were here yesterday very early and we saw, you know, the sniff dogs and. Yeah, well, we have to take care of not only our speakers, but ourselves, all of us here on site. So it's just a necessary shift. And because we started with emotions, I just want to say something. That was awesome thing, the drone show. That was just so cool. I really enjoyed that. Yeah, it was amazing. And I'm waiting to see some more awesome stuff tonight.

[22:06] **Barbara Palmer:** Cool.

[22:07] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Gwen Stefani.

[22:07] **Barbara Palmer:** Gwen Stefani. And a stadium filled with people singing, I predict.

[22:15] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Yeah, that would be cool. Well, thank you so much for the time and sharing with the online audience what you noticed. So thank you.

[22:25] **Michelle Russell:** Thanks, Maggie.

[22:26] **Barbara Palmer:** Thanks, Maggie.

[22:27] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Thank you. As usual. You'll find all the links in the show notes. 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. Stay inspired. Keep inspiring. And until next time.