Coach Approach Ministries Podcast

Episode 23: Beginning and Ending a Conversation

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[Intro Music]

Brian Miller: Welcome to the Coach Approach Ministries podcast where we help people find their way with God by training the best Christian coaches in the world. I'm Brian Miller, strategic director for Coach Approach Ministries, CAM for short, and I'm joined here today by the CAM leadership team, Chad Hall, the president of CAM, and Bill Copper, executive director of CAM. Today's episode is a bonus episode that comes from our CAM leadership team's Q&A series. In these Q&A's, we try to go below the surface of the questions. I'm always disappointed when I get access to a favorite author or speaker in a breakout session or on a podcast, and they simply rehash the first chapter of their book. We want our answers to give you a true insider's look to the world of Christian coaching. Today's Q&A considers beginning and ending a coaching conversation. We hope you enjoy it. So, let me ask Bill, Chad, let me ask some questions here that we'll just get started with. How do you start a coaching conversation?

Bill Copper: That's a good question that comes up a lot, Brian, and one of the ways that I find is helpful is to do a little bit of connecting at the beginning of each conversation. Part of our role as a coach is to create intimacy and develop trust with our clients, so I like to start a conversation by doing a little bit of relationship building, checking in, but pretty quickly, I've moved into asking my clients, "What is it that you want to talk about today?" I don't bring an agenda, but I ask the client to kind of rough out at least in an overview, what it is on their mind, or what they want to talk about.

Brian: Well you said pretty quickly, you go into the question of what do you want to talk about, and I'll just be honest with you, Bill. In many of my coaching situations, one, I'm coaching friends, so I'm interested in their lives, and I find that maybe within an hour, I may talk 10, 15, maybe a little longer than that about relational things. Part in my head, I'm thinking, "Well, I'll make this up on the end," but most of the time, they've set aside an hour. They're busy people. Is that too much?

Bill: Well it's always going to depend on the relationship that you have established. What I find is that when my clients were paying me to be there for them for coaching, we moved pretty quickly into the coaching. I find it much more convenient to do some catching up on the back end if there's time. I have good relationships, consider most of my clients good friends, but the coaching conversations themselves, though they take a casual, conversational tone, we're there for a purpose, and there's some intentionality there. I move pretty quickly in the front end into getting down to what they want to talk about, and oftentimes, do a bit more connecting on the back end if we have time.

Brian: Is that just a self-management issue, or is there more I can be thinking about, about how to move. I don't want to move too quickly because I think that's my bent actually is to get right to it. So, what are some tips and tricks to help me make that transition a little more disciplined?

Chad Hall: I'll chime in on that one, Brian. I give myself five minutes, and I don't always take it, but if it's five minutes past the beginning of the coaching conversation, and we're still kind of chit-chatting, or what'd you do over the holiday, or that kind of thing, I look for the next opportunity to transition to agenda. What I am aware of is that sometimes clients need to share the update, and sometimes it creates context, it's actually valuable to them to do that, so certainly don't want to cut them off or minimize that value, but I've got, just in my own head, that five-minute signal. The other technique that I find really helpful is a prep form.

When you think, how do you start a coaching conversation, you start it before the conversation starts. My clients who use prep forms, they come in ready to be coached, and we tend to hit the ground running much more quickly, much more efficiently, we tend to end on time, and it's not just that it's a more efficient coaching conversation. I think it's a more effective coaching conversation because they've thought ahead of time, what it is that they want to be coached on, what do they want to get out of the conversation, and we can dive in after that quick connecting, relation part at the beginning. We can just get into the deep end of the conversation, in terms of the coaching conversation.

Brian: That's good.

Bill: I'm sorry. That's a really good, effective tool. I'll throw one caution out there, and Brian, I think I learned this from Chad, this caution, and that is not to let the prep form trap you into limiting the conversation, and so as people have been thinking ahead of time, "Here's what I want to talk about," be open to the possibility that life happens since they sent you that email, and don't lock them into only talk about what was on that prep form.

Brian: I would say, if you're not using a prep form with at least one of your clients, you should be. You may not use it for all, but that's definitely a tool that I think should be in everybody's tool kit.

Chad: I'd give one more response to this, Brian, in terms of how to start a coaching conversation. I don't necessarily ask these three questions, in fact I probably never ask these three questions exactly the way I'm going to say them, but I am always on the lookout for three items. What's the topic? And honestly, if I can't, in one or two words, name the topic, I probably haven't helped the client get very clear on what the topic is. So, I want to know one, what's the topic? Two, what's the goal for the topic, and that's the long-term goal for that time? Three, what's the goal for the conversation? I just find, that's a good way to start a conversation. Probably going to cover those three items in the first five to ten minutes of the actual coaching portion of the conversation. Again, I don't want to lock people into the standard memorized questions. I probably never ask those questions exactly that way, but you're looking for that. For the coaching conversation to be successful, those are three things the client has to know. I kind of think about those essential parts of the topics of the top part of the hourglass model.

Brian: I want you to expand on the third one. The first one was, you need to know what the topic is in a couple words. Two, you need to know the goal for the topic which needs to be their goal. That's an easy one to mess up, but the third one, you said the goal for the conversation.

Chad: Yeah. So, I'll give an example of a recent coaching conversation. The topic was, the client had a potential job proposal. A position had opened up in his organization. He needed to decide whether to put his name in the hat for the position. The topic was this position, new position. His goal for the topic was he needed to determine whether or not to do that. The goal is, "Hey, I want to be in the right position within the organization." The goal for the conversation was what part of that do we need to figure out together during the coaching? What I kind of think of is the goal for the topic is really long-ranged, and then we're going to back up so that one hour from now, the client is moving in the right direction, he's in the right trajectory toward the goal for the topic. It's the proverbial, "What do you hope to walk away with?" What's the bullseye for this conversation? Those kinds of things.

Brian: So, I think the first and third one were more obvious to me, and the second one might be the one that was a little more nuanced for me.

Chad: I think a lot of times we assume that if we know what the topic is, we know what the goal for the topic is, but this guy, he was trying to determine whether to put his name in the hat for this. Really as we expanded on his goal for that topic, it was, "I want to be in a position that fits me, and my goal is to have a position where a=I can contribute it my best, and not take too much away from my family. Well okay. Good. That's a goal for the topic.

Brian: That is, I think, a common mistake people make. So, let's look at the other end. What happens when you're running out of time? What do you need to do?

Chad: That never happened to me.

Brian: In fact, that always happen to you. Perhaps the never/always.

Chad: We always treat it as that always happens to me. I'm terrible at managing the time. Confession.

Brian: So, you look at the clock. You've got 10 minutes. It caught you by surprise. How do you transition.

Bill: I think you just named the first key, Brian, is don't let it catch you by surprise. Part of our managing the process is that we manage the time, and so all along the way, I have found it helpful to remind the client of how much time we have. On that front end that we were just talking about, once we get settled on those three things Chad talked about, where are we headed in this conversation, I usually remind the client at that point, "Alright. So, we've got about 45 minutes to talk about that. Where should we begin?" Then maybe every 10 or 15 minutes, as the conversation is flowing, I will call out the time again, and I'm not strict about this, but along the way when there's the right place for is, I'll say, "Great. Well we've got about 30 more minutes.

What's going to be the best direction for us to head here?" When we get to that 10-minute mark that you're talking about, whether we managed it well along the way, or whether it's caught us by surprise, I'll typically call that out. I'll say, "Brian, you know we've got about 10 minutes left. What's going to be the best way to spend that 10 minutes, so you get what you wanted out of this conversation?" It's my responsibility to manage the time, but I put responsibility on the client to determine what they want to do during that time. I don't try to steer there. I'm probably less likely to run over than Chad is, as he describes it, because I value this agreement that we've had which is we're going to spend 60 minutes on the phone. With that 10 minutes left, I usually say to the client, if it seems like, "Wow. This isn't going as quickly as I noticed it, or I wasn't really paying that much attention," I'll just give it to the client to say, "Hey, we've got about ten minutes. What's going to be the best way to spend that?"

Brian: I'm hearing even, we're all wired different. Time just doesn't get away from Bill as it might Chad or I. Chad, I love the vulnerability here too, so with some experience of losing track of time, which is going to be some of our listeners' issue as well. What do you do? What's a good catch?

Chad: I tell you, and because I'm not naturally good at this, I've learned a lot about it. One thing that I've learned is that going over is not necessarily considered generous. For a year or two I thought, "If we go over, the client's going to be happy because I've given more of my time than they paid for," and I don't know why it took me so long to realize at least more than half the time's not the case. They, as Bill said, they budgeted an hour, and we've got to get from topic to takeaway in an hour. I mean that's what we have. We've got to make it happen in that amount of time, and to make it happen in more time, they're paying more in time than they had bargained for. So, that was the thing for me was a mental shift from going over is generous to going over is wasteful.

The other thing that I've learned is kind of what Bill's saying, partner with the client. If I realize we've got 10 minutes, and I do watch the clock better now, I'll say, "Okay. We've got 10 minutes." If it seems like we're not really going to be finished in 10 minutes, if I have extra time, I'll renegotiate with the client and say, "We have 10 minutes. If we need to go over, I can give another 10 minutes, but what do you have?" Now I'm not assuming that they want to give more time. They want to go past the top of the hour, or whatever we're aiming for. I've found that to be really helpful that we kind of co-contract, or re-contract, there toward the end, so if we need to extend the time, we're not doing it based on assumption, we're being really intentional with it.

The other thing I've learned is that bringing up the 15 to 10, even a 5-minute countdown, as in Myers-Briggs terms, I'm a perceiver, which means I put things off until the last minute. Having not much time really focuses the mind, and I've found that to be the case for a lot of my clients, so that might really add fuel to their thought process to realize, "Hey. We're running out of time. Let's pull an all-nighter here at the last five minutes, and get it done," and that happens to be one of the ways that perceivers work best which is a mad rush of work at the last minute, and I'm open to that. It works for a lot of clients.

Brian: The thing I see a lot of times in coaches is that they feel awkward about being abrupt, but I think it's a mistake to feel awkward about it to do, and say, "Alright. We've got 10 minutes left. What do you have so far? I know we haven't thought everything through, but what do you have so far?"

Chad: Here's the part that I hear a lot of, not beginner coaches, but a lot of moderately experienced coaches, they think they have to manage the time behind the client's back. "Oh, I'm the only one who's aware that we've got 10 minutes. What should I do? To Bill's point, that's the very time to partner with the client. You don't have to be the one thinking, "Oh, we only have 10 minutes, what should I do?" You put that out in the conversation, and you share that, and you let the client bare responsibility as well as you as the coach.

Brian: Yeah. Typically, I know where I want to go, and the coach doesn't. I think that's really good. Well guys, that's all the time we have today for our questions and answers. I hope that our listeners enjoyed that. I did, and I learned a few things. I hope you can also learn, just from our vulnerability, that we are not perfect coaches. We do this for a living, and we're not perfect coaches, so hopefully that's an encouragement to you as well, and not an oh-my-goodness. Thank you so much for joining us. You can find out more about us by going to www.coachapproachministries.org and downloading our free eBook, *The Beginner's Guide to Christian Coaching: How to Have Powerful Conversations That Really Make a Difference*. We'll see you next week.

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