



Coach Approach Ministries Podcast

Episode 30: David Knauss Part I

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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. Today, I want to share part one of my interview with David Knauss, of Knauss Executive Coaching. So, I'm joined here today by David Knauss, of Knauss Executive Coaching, and David, I've heard such good things about your coaching practice. I've heard really good things about you as well. People speak really highly of you, how good a coach you are, how humble you are, how much you love to give God the praise for all that he's done in your life, and I think there's just so much we can learn through you today to help us all with our own coaching practice.

David Knauss: Well all glory to the Lord. It's only him.

Brian: Amen, amen. Let's start. How did you get into the field of coaching in the first place?

David: Well that's an interesting story, and actually, I guess, you might say, I kind of reluctantly, in some ways... Originally, my wife and I, even as we met, our hearts and passions were for serving overseas and in third world countries. In the early 90's, we actually went to [country name removed for safety purposes 00:01:36] after the wall collapsed, and God did some amazing things over there, but as our children, they were small at the time, as they grew, we came back in 2007 for a one year furlough to kind of make sure they had the education they needed to get into college if they so desired. While we were back, I was meeting with one of our supporters. A friend of mine, Dan, in Portland, OR who actually had a counseling practice. So, we were just having a beer together and talking about life, and I asked him how his counseling practice was going, and he said, "Well actually, it's changing significantly because I started using some coaching principles in my counseling practice," and I said, "Oh, well good for you." He said, "Do you know what coaching is," and I'm, "I don't know, basketball or soccer?"

Brian: Sure, we get that all the time.

David: He said, "No. In fact, it so revolutionized my practice that my clients who typically would go for two years in my counseling practice, now get through those things in about six months, so I have to go out and find clients all the time." Then he said, "Because of that, I decided I should probably use this in the corporate world where I could get paid even better and not have to be looking for as many clients."

Brian: That was a shift for a reason because that was a shift for the client reason. He needed to go back to the old mode. He needed to go back to the way where it took more like a year and a half to get through a client.

David: Right, exactly. He was like, "If I'm going to do this, I might as well find some clients who can pay me for a longer period of time, and well." I said, "That's great. Good for you."

Brian: Totally unimpressed.

David: Totally unimpressed. The Lord blessed. Then something in that conversation, something amazing happened too because he asked me, "Well, what's going on with you," and I started sharing, and he said, "So what's your future look like," and I said, "Well, I don't know. I'm afraid if we do this, this would happen, and I'm afraid if we did this, this would happen, and so we're kind of just in this hold." I kept talking about fear, and he just stopped me at one point and said, "So what I'm hearing is that you value fear."

Brian: Wow.

David: That just stopped me cold, and I was like, "Well, no." He said, "Well you fear this. You fear that, and you're afraid if you do this, this will happen," and it really kind of rocked me. About four months later, he called me up, and he said, "David, I have a business client, and I'm doing some coach training with their executive team, and I would love to fly you out here and have you help me do this coach training," and I was like, "What are you talking about? I don't even really understand coaching."

Brian: Now wait a second. I thought when you said that, you were going to say that he was going to invite you out for the training so that you could learn a little bit about it, but he wants you to help train.

David: He just threw me right in, and because he knew me he said, "Dave, you're already doing these things. You just don't know it," and because of who I am, and my personality, and things, he said, "This will help bring some clarity for you," and I said, "Look, I love you, and my mom lives in that same town, so if you want to pay for me to come out, I'll hang with you, and I'll get to see my mom." I guess, in a way, that's why I say I was reluctant to this whole process.

Brian: The real price for you is you were going to get to see your mom on a free trip.

David: Exactly. Who wouldn't want to see their mom? I came kind of reluctantly to the time, and very cautiously, and really what is this all about? Those two days transformed my life and changed my perspective and gave me not only the words, but some real deeper purposes to everything we'd already been doing with church planting, disciple making, evangelism. I just started to see the entire way in which coaching as a tool could be revolutionary in the work I was already doing.

Brian: So, you saw two things there. I'd like to dig into that a little deeper. You saw a tool kit, but it also changed your whole mindset about how you would approach your work. What were some of the mindset shifts there?

David: For example, in [country name removed for safety purposes 00:06:32], we worked in a southern part of [country name removed for safety purposes 00:06:34]. It's a very Muslim based area, and so

first of all, you can't be in the country as a missionary, and then being a strong evangelist doesn't really work either in the sense of just standing on a street corner with a bullhorn. Shifting that mindset to actually asking them questions that would help them progress in their understanding of spiritual awareness that would be driven by them, not me, was actually kind of revolutionary.

Brian: That's beautiful. So, Jesus is already working in their life. They're just not aware of it, and there are questions you could ask not to lead them but to seriously just help them create some awareness of spirituality, what's going on in their life, and they discover Jesus inside.

David: Exactly.

Brian: Neat.

David: The other aspect to that was that we had come back for the education of our children, but our agency also was going through some infrastructure issues, and the board of directors approached me and said, "David, would you consider taking on the presidency of our mission agency while you're back?"

Brian: Goodness.

David: And I was, again, reluctant to do that because I was on furlough, and I really needed rest. I didn't need to take on a whole other job. So, I had already been doing that for maybe a couple of months when Dan called me and wanted to invite me out. So, the second application I saw to this was really for leading the non-profit organization, and how that could give me a tool kit in which to lead with.

Brian: Got you. How would that work? You're doing a non-profit. What's the mindset that would be real helpful to you in a non-profit setting?

David: A couple things that jumped out at me immediately in that time was our board of directors, and I served them and they really needed some direction and some leading, but I'm supposed to be getting that from them, so how do I approach that in a way that doesn't come across as me dictating to them what they really need to be doing? So, I began using those coaching principles to simply come to the table with... First of all, listing what I'm hearing from them, and then bringing those types of questions to the table that discuss the organization as a whole, and our direction, and our vision, those types of things.

Brian: Perfect.

David: So as the Lord would have it, I ended up, because again, some educational things. One of our children, our third son, we found out he had some needs. Some auditory and visual processing disorder type things, and so we really needed to stay back and help him do some training and education around how he learns.

Brian: So, you think God's going to send you back to [country name removed for safety purposes 00:09:54]. You're just here to get a break, to take a rest, to help your kids, and Dan's saying these things to you, and your board saying these things to you, and then there's the doctor saying things to you, and you're like something's going on here.

David: That's exactly right. After a couple years of leading the organization, I really started to feel some burnout myself, and I went to the board, and I said, "May I take a sabbatical. I really need a sabbatical." So, they granted me a four-month sabbatical, and during that sabbatical, I had called an old supervisor up. He had retired, he and his wife, and I said, "Would you be a sabbatical coach for me in this process," which he agreed to, and we met weekly by phone during that process. Out of that process, I learned some things, I rested, I had just reconnected on many levels with the Lord, and my family. So now, I'm coming out of the sabbatical. I have my first meeting with our board of directors, and they did wonderfully while I was gone.

I had completely disengaged, but they had decided to take the organization in another direction. So, when I came back, they were sharing with me, with excitement, all the changes they had made, and I had kind of an out-of-body where I was kind of listening to myself talk. I felt like I was just up in a little corner hearing myself, and one of the things I said, I said, "I don't think that's all the Lord has for us. He has something else in mind for us." So, I called my wife that evening, and I said, "I think I just resigned," and so they were very gracious, and said, "Take a few weeks to think and pray over this," and we did, and it was very clear at that point that God was leading us out of that.

Brian: Out of education, or out of missions altogether?

David: Out of missions altogether, out of the organization. However, I had started taking some coaching courses at the time at Western Seminary. I had entered the Master's program there, and that's actually where I came in contact with Chad and Coach Approach Ministries, and I'd been taking some courses and flying back there to Portland from where we were living on a quarterly basis. I was getting this coach training because it was really helping me lead the organization. In the process of that, I had some coach clients, if you will, because you've got to get practice in coaching and all of that. I had coached an orthopedic office, managers there, and interestingly enough, they had given me six weeks, and we had an annual board meeting, and at that board meeting is when I was officially turning in my resignation to them. It was a celebration time.

There was nothing bad about the whole process. It was just a joyful time, but that morning, I heard the Lord say to me, "David, I want you to say yes to the very thing I give you today." I'm like, "Okay. That's interesting." So, my antennas were up all day. I'm resigning. We have an all-day board meeting, and it was a celebration in the evening, and it was just very honoring, the whole thing, but we got home that evening about 9:30, and I said, "I didn't hear anything today about this, that the Lord was saying. Maybe I heard him wrong," and she said, "Well have you checked your email?" We had a practice of not checking our emails in the evenings because it can get your mind going on things, so I said, "Okay. I'll check." Sure enough, there was an email from a non-profit organization in Indianapolis that said, "David, we have \$10,000, and we know we're supposed to hire you to consult us in our business. How much of your time would that buy?" It was quite amazing.

Brian: So out of the blue? Were you familiar with these folks at all? How did they get your name?

David: I knew one person on the board, and that's another whole story, but that person had recommended me as they were developing the organization. They were a non-profit that was God-driven, if you will, spirit-led, and so they had said, "We just heard from the Lord that you're the guy." I

said, "Well I don't really know anything about consulting, but I'm doing this coach training, and I could bring coaching to the table," and so the next day they wrote back and said, "Well we don't know anything about coaching, but we know we're supposed to hire you, so we'll take you." So, I ended, and this was at the end of 2009, I believe, and so I started with them in January of 2010. I just remember driving down, and we did kind of a half day to kind of kick things off and figure out direction and vision, and some of those things. I just remember driving home from that meeting, and I just knew that I knew that I knew that this was the next step that the Lord was leading us into.

Brian: So, if I understand so far, the way to get into coaching at a level that you're at is to serve in a heavily Muslim country, come back for sabbatical, take the presidency of the organization, kind of ignore friends who say, "You'd be good at this," and then just wait for an email.

David: And stumble that way.

Brian: The big picture, and you told me this before, is God just kept opening doors for you. That's really what happened. God kept opening doors.

David: That's exactly right. So, then the next step to this entire thing was my wife, who is also a nurse, her grandmother, who was 88 at the time, lived in Bend, OR, sent out a notice to the family, "I need help. I can't live on my own anymore. I'm widowed, and the cost of living is difficult. Would anybody be willing to move to Bend, OR, and just help me," and my wife said, "David, this is a passion of mine. If we're going to do something, I really want to care for Grandma." I thought, "You're a nurse. You could probably get a job there pretty easily. I'm in coaching. I don't have to be tied to one location." We prayed about it, so the Lord led us to do that. In January of 2011, we moved to Bend, OR, and it's a very interesting thing because the work in [country name removed for safety purposes 00:17:24], God anointed it. It was amazing. We lived in this small village that we ended up meeting with mayors, and governors, and minister of agriculture, and... God just did some amazing things, but it was also very elevating, and then the next thing we knew, we were in Bend, OR, not in ministry. Neither of us really had jobs at that point, and we went through a very difficult period of time for about six months to the point where we actually ended up homeless with two of our children and sleeping on people's couches. We were in kind of a daze of Lord, what's going on here. To the coaching part of this, I thought I would just try to do anything I could, and I connected with an economic development group. It's non-profit, there was no money involved, and they asked me to come in, and they were having some problems with their board level and do some volunteer coaching with them. God blessed that coaching time. Things really turned around for them as an organization, and they had started ten more groups, ten more economic areas that they wanted to work on, and they asked if I would volunteer coach for each of these ten areas, these ten teams that they were starting. I said, "Look, I've got to feed my family. I can't do this as a volunteer." They said, "Well what if we were to line up some coaches, and you interviewed them and asked them to volunteer," and I said, "Well that's great. I've only been in Bend, OR for six months, and I don't know anybody." So, I was meeting with some coaches to ask them if they would volunteer and serve at helping these teams develop the economic stability of the region here, and I met with this lady, wonderful lady in her mid-50's, has a coaching practice, and in about 10 or 15 minutes into the conversation, she said, "David, I don't know how to explain this, but you just have this aura about you." That's how the words that she was trying to figure out. She goes, "I just signed a contract

for a corporate coaching engagement, and I don't know if you have the bandwidth for this, but I would love to invite you in to join me in this contract." This is a little bit, I'm not sure if this is okay to say, but she said, "Oh and by the way, how much do you charge," and this was something I had actually talked with my coach, who happened to be Chad at the time, and he had asked me, "If you get into coaching, how much would you charge," and I stumbled around as a missionary, my numbers were way off, and he actually had me practicing these things out loud. It came out of me almost like muscle memory. I said, "I said \$250 an hour."

Brian: Nice!

David: She leaned in... Yeah! It was amazing. It was hard for me to say that, but it came out, and she leaned in and said, "Oh honey, you need to be ready to make more money than that." I was like, "Okay..." So, it turned out to be a contract with a hospital, and it wasn't just a hospital, it was a group of hospitals, and then the largest employer in the whole central and eastern part of the state. The largest employer over 3,000 employees, and there were 11 executives that oversaw the running of all these hospitals, and I was to take on 5 of these. Here I am. I don't have a website. I don't have a business card. I don't even have an LLC. Sole proprietor, and I'm starting in this huge corporate account where they have lawyers on their staff. I was given two CEO's that covered three hospitals, the chief nursing officer of the entire system, and the chief information officer, and another. My very first coaching engagement with the CEO of the largest hospital in the area, I simply ask him, and I'll try to keep this condensed and confidential, our first meeting we're sitting down, and I simply ask, "What would you like me to know about you," and he said, "Well you need to know why I do what I do." I say, "Great," and he went on to tell me about his earlier years, and he did this crazy extreme sports and all this, and he was heli-skiing up in Alaska, and there was a group of six of them, and they moved onto this new glacier, and the person in front of him, he was number two, fell through the ice and ended up on kind of a shelf about 20 feet below the ice. So, he waved off the other people, and he said, and the person was a lady, said, "Don't move because there's nothing underneath you. If you fall through the ice, you'll just fall through, and it will be the end." It took eight hours for the other group to ski down, hitchhike, and get search and rescue. He said, "For eight hours, I was in sheer panic, and it would just kind of go it waves, and the ice would start to crack, and I would get very scared and fearful, and then it would stop, and I would calm down a little bit. So, in the midst of those eight hours, I promised that if I would get out of this situation, I would make my life count."

Brian: Foxhole conversion.

David: Exactly. So, I simply asked him, "So, who did you make the promise to," and I thought he would say, "Well to myself," and he said, "I made that promise to God," and I said, "Oh, tell me about your relationship with God," and he kind of hummed and hawed and talked about his grandfather being a pastor and different things. I said, "Now we're ending our time." We only have about 45 minutes together, and I said, "Well if you made that promise to God, and he got you out of that situation, have you ever asked him what it would mean to make your life count," and there was just dead silence, and he looked at me and said, "David, I've never in all these years, decades, I've never stopped to ask that question. I need to know how to answer that question." So, we ended our time there, and I'm driving home, and I'm thinking, "Okay, Lord, you called me out of full time ministry overseas and into this

coaching business, and now we're having significant life discussions with the CEO of the largest employer in our region, and we need to be doing business stuff, and it was coaching the person from the get-go, and I got paid for it.

Brian: I hope you enjoyed part one of my interview with David Knauss, of Knauss Executive Coaching. In part two, I ask David how he adapted his coaching in a field that he had little to no knowledge, and David also shares how his business grew while God called him back to the mission field. See you next week.

[Outro Music]