



Coach Approach Ministries Podcast

Episode 40: When Coaches Should Share Their Story

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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. Our podcast today is sponsored by our certificate in leadership coaching. This is a nine-month, ICF approved, coach training program that will prepare you to coach those around you and set goals, take action, and reach new levels of success. We have a cohort forming in April, so if you're interested, go to our website at www.coachapproachministries.org/coachnow. I'm Brian Miller, strategic director for Coach Approach Ministries, CAM for short, and I'm joined here today by the executive director of Coach Approach Ministries, Mr. Bill Copper. How are you today, Bill?

Bill Copper: Wow, the way you say that, it's almost like it's in bold, and capitalized, and even italicized. I'm doing great, Brian. Good to be with you, as always.

Brian: That's exactly right. Chad mentioned that I always introduce him as the president, and he wanted some theme music, so last week, I gave him some theme music.

Bill: You didn't do *Hail to the Chief*, did you?

Brian: I did *Hail to the Chief*.

Bill: Did you really? That is great.

Brian: Hey, you've got a great topic to talk about today, Bill, and I'm really looking forward to it. It's not one we talk about a lot. The topic we want to talk about today is sharing more of your story in the coaching, and actually, we usually talk about sharing less of your story in the coaching, but you've been thinking a lot about this, and you wanted to head in that direction. What's made you think this was an important topic, Bill?

Bill: Well, one of the things we try to do in these podcasts is help people go a little bit deeper than the foundations. We certainly teach in the beginning coaching courses, people beginning to develop this mindset, we teach folks to kind of stay out of it, to kind of keep themselves out of it. Focus on the other person, focus on their answers, their solutions, their story, and that is important. Also, though, I think one of the things you and I have learned, and other coaches have learned, is that there is a way, and a

place, for sharing yourself in helping people to discover, and we want to create discovery. We want to promote discovery, create some awareness, and one way to do that is to share of ourselves. It's a big part of the coaching relationship, to create intimacy and trust. So, I guess I'd call this a bit more of an advanced skill for coaches. Once we feel confident that we're not bringing our agenda into it, then it becomes a bit more safe to risk sharing our self, our own story and to do that without any agenda. I'm going to share a little bit about that today, some reasons we might do it, some ways to do it, and maybe some cautions to be aware of.

Brian: Yeah, and I think they fit into the competencies as well. The first thing we want to talk about is sharing the story of yourself to connect. Certainly, this is establishing intimacy, that type of thing.

Bill: There are times when... In any coaching relationship, the more connected, the more intimacy that is built, the more trust that is built between the coach and the client, the more our clients are willing to open up, to share, to explore. When they know it's a safe place, then they're willing to dig deeper and explore what's in there, so it's a way to help us draw out things that are inside of them that maybe they're not even aware of. A great way to promote and enhance intimacy is for the conversation and the relationship to go both ways, to not focus only on what's going on with the client, although, again, don't lose sight that that is our focus, but to share some intimacy by sharing some of our self, and sometimes that could be just in the connecting that we do with our clients in those conversations.

A lot of times, it literally is sharing one of our own stories, a story from our own life. That often is a great way, particularly when it relates to what's going on with our clients, a great way to build intimacy and trust, create that space where they feel safe to explore, and it promotes them going a bit deeper, exploring themselves, their issues, maybe even their story.

Brian: I think it creates vulnerability on both ends. Vulnerability is just the word that came to mind as you were saying that because I think we could have the mindset of only sharing successful stories, maybe painting ourselves only as winners, but I think even perhaps better stories to create a relationship, to establish intimacy, would be stories of vulnerability to show I'm going to be vulnerable, and then you can be vulnerable without any risk.

Bill: I think that's a great point Brian is that sharing our story doesn't only mean, as you say, times when we won. Sometimes we create this illusion, and it's only really in our own heads, this illusion that everything goes great for us all the time, and sometimes that can create some distance between us and our clients because internally, they're feeling like, "Well, gosh. Everything doesn't always go great for me." Then we can share parts of ourselves where things didn't go great, or aren't going great right now. That vulnerability creates some real intimacy and trust that, as you say, gives the client permission, maybe, to share on their own, and feel normalized in having not such a great day, or things not go extremely well because they don't feel like they're in contrast to your greatness and how everything's going great for you.

Brian: I think some kind of balance. The cautions from me would be, I have a friend who, every story he tells, he's the hero. I mean every story, everybody's doing something stupid except for him. That's not the way to go, and the second mistake would be that you're just always a complaint, that you can't seem to win, or woe is me kind of thought, but just general, good sharing of your life.

Bill: Yeah, and I think it's important, when sharing those stories, even of things didn't go great, stories of

vulnerability, also create some hope there to also share that there's life on the other side of that, that it's not despair all the time. It doesn't have to be this miraculous thing happened over night, and now look at me, but just create some hope, make it an encouraging part of the conversation so that whatever they might be going through, doesn't feel like, "Boy, I'm the only one that's ever experienced this awful sense, or this awful feeling, or this awful emotion," but also that when others have felt it and experienced it, there's an end to it. There's a light at the end of the tunnel kind of scene.

Brian: That leads us right into our second point today, Bill. Sharing the story of yourself normalizes.

Bill: You've experienced this, and I have too, thinking that I don't want to let them know. There's this great Christian coach I'm talking to, and I'm almost embarrassed to tell him some of the thoughts I've had or some of the frustrations I've had, or difficulties I've had because they've got it all together. When I'm sharing myself with my clients, and I share the same frustrations they have and even share maybe even a very similar experience. There's something about that that says, "Oh good." There's a relief on their part that says, "I'm not weird for thinking this. I'm not out of the mainstream, and it's okay to have felt this, to experience this, to have made this mistake, but also, it's okay to share that with somebody else, and I'm not going to be judged by it." I think that's one of the keys to sharing self is that it opens the door for them to share in a nonjudgmental space.

Brian: I can think of several examples. There's times that I would share that I've tried out for jobs I didn't get. I think that can normalize. People, when they don't get a job, they're feeling so bad about themselves, but it happens to a lot of people, not just you. Another one I distinctly remember, this was back a while ago, and you were mentor coaching me, and I had set up several training classes, and I was hitting homerun after homerun, Bill, and then I had a class that nobody signed up for. I got on the phone, and I know what I was feeling inside was this, "Okay. It's over," and you shared with me, I don't know if I'll ever forget, you shared with me, it was real simple, you said, "Yeah. That happens."

Bill: I remember that, and I remember kind of the light bulb that went off for you that said, "Oh good. I'm not a failure. Those folks, they have classes that people don't sign up for too. [inaudible 00:10:29] For whatever it is that I'm doing, it just means that yeah, that happens, and now, what's going to happen next?"

Brian: Bill, I lost you right when you said that happens. Any chance you could repeat that?

Bill: Yeah, sorry. I noticed the audio playing little tricks here. Sorry if I'm putting out a little bandwidth problem. I was just saying that does happen, and it sometimes gives your client a sense that oh good, that's not going to be the end of the road. Those guys have classes that don't make too, and wow, okay, that doesn't mean I'm a failure, it doesn't mean it's all over for me, it just simply means okay, what's next? It creates, I think, more hope and more encouragement when somebody experiences something that, in their mind, is an anomaly, it can't happen, it means this, and they find out others have experienced it too, and they find out it turns out, it's not that big a deal.

Brian: I think it was, I was going to say perfect, but I don't want to put that word in your head.

Bill: Oh no, no, no, no. I think that's quite appropriate if you're describing my coaching.

Brian: A perfect way of doing it because you didn't say, "Oh Brian, you shouldn't worry about that." You

didn't say, "Well tell me how you advertised it." You just simply made a statement that yeah, that happens sometimes, and the awareness was mine. The awareness ended up being mine, that I realized this is how it is to be in the training game. You have no idea how a calendar works sometimes, and sometimes the calendar date works, and sometimes the calendar date doesn't, but that all became aware to me of your simple statement, sharing your own story.

Bill: You gave some examples, I've got one where my mentor coach was, well, I was discouraged because in a leadership position, I was trying some of the principles that I had learned and that he had shared with me, and I was feeling like, "Wow. That didn't work that time. It didn't work with this particular staff person, or I didn't get the results," almost embarrassed to say, "I tried the stuff we talked about, and it didn't work." He had a very similar message. "Yeah. Sometimes it doesn't work," and I thought, "What do you mean it doesn't?" "Yeah, it's a great principle. It's a great leadership skill and tool, and it has great results, and sometimes it doesn't," and that doesn't negate the fact that it's a good principle, it just means in that situation, it didn't... Man, that just turned the corner for me and made me realize, we can have good principles, we can have good processes. That doesn't ensure it's always going to work, but it's still a good principle. It's still a good process. I can feel okay in believing it and using it, even it's not 100% effective.

Brian: Well, nothing's 100% effective. That's a truth we need to tell people. So, I'm hearing a couple things that are standing out to me. One, it can create vulnerability to let people show you care. As I've coached church planters, there's an area, church planters do not want to share any weakness or failure a lot of times because they feel under the gun or judged. I'm sure that's with a lot of people, so to create that kind of vulnerability with your own stories has got to help. The other one I heard very clearly from you is it creates hope, that even though things may not be going absolutely perfect right now, there's always room for positive things to happen in the future, and we can get, easily, a mindset of that's not true.

Bill: And at the same time, when we talk about sharing our self, we'll talk about maybe another time that it makes sense. We want to be sure and throw this caution out there that sharing our self doesn't mean shifting the focus of the conversation or the relationship to us. We want to be cautious of that. We'll talk about that in a little bit maybe about ways to ensure that, but this is not an excuse, particularly for new coaches, to say, "Oh good. I don't have to give up it being about me." Yeah, you do. It's not about you. You're sharing of yourself in service to the other person. Sharing of yourself is in service of the relationship, to the intimacy, to the encouragement, those kinds of things, and it's never about you. So, we don't want to lose sight of that.

Brian: No, that's a great caution, and you've mentored a lot of coaches. So have I, and the ones who can't give up the solution, are the ones who it's always, "Well, on this call, I knew the answer," but it seems like that's true for every call you've had.

Bill: We have an answer, often, when we let ourselves. That's a real pet peeve of mine that we allow ourselves to say, "Yeah, I trust that you've got it in you. I believe in you. I believe the Holy Spirit is alive there and working, but in this case, on this topic, on this day, you really don't have it in you, and you need it from me." We just want to be cautious of having that mindset. Always check yourself. When you're about to say, "Well, in this case." Check your motives there. Make sure you're not betraying a trust and a belief in the other person that you expressed previously.

Brian: So, the third point we wanted to make today, sharing the story of yourself to create awareness.

Bill: There are a lot of things we do as coaches that are meant to create awareness, and we often ask questions, probing questions. We make observations and then offer those observations up. There are other times, though, when we share something, like a metaphor, or a story, or a principle. Sometimes what we share is our own story. We share a little bit about our own experience going through something like that. In order to create a picture that's maybe separate from what's going on inside the other person, so they can be removed a little bit from it, almost like we're showing them a video of a story that's not theirs that they can get some learning, or some truth, or some principle from. So, sometimes that comes in the form of us just sharing ourselves.

I went through that myself, Brian, and just shared a little bit about what happened to me, and we tell a little bit of the story. In order to kind of get it out of their head, and their emotion, and their thinking, you're going to paint a picture of how things went. The caution, again, here is, make sure it's their awareness, and it's not simply delivering to them, here's what happened, and here's what you need to do. That happens, here's what happened to me. Kind of like in the example you gave about scheduling coach training. As you said, it would have been inappropriate to say, "That happens, and here's what we do in those cases. Here's how we approach that, and here's how we think about that." Sharing the story just simply meant, you have that happen, it happens to us, and it will make sure that the client gets the awareness, figures out what to do with that.

Brian: That was great awareness. I had a coaching session just recently, and I find this with leaders all the time because the basic things that leaders need to do, according to Patrick Lencioni, now according to me, this truth of you've got to build trust. You've got to have trust on your team, and the way that you do that, according to Lencioni, is you share stories about yourself, and specifically, it was interesting, we were on this topic of getting a small group be able to talk about difficult political issues. I can't imagine in this culture today, Bill, that it's tough to talk about political issues amongst more than one person. If you've got two people in a room, you could be very polarized, right?

Bill: Two people in a room means three opinions, at least.

Brian: The story needs to be short, by the way. I don't think we've said that, but I shared the story of a kind of thing that you could do to build trust about issues like this. I was ten years old. I went to the voting booth with my parents. I was able to walk in with my dad, saw him vote. Then I walked in with my mom and saw her vote. We got back in the car, and I said, "Why did you guys not vote for the same person," and my mom says, "You voted for Ford?" He goes, "Well... I thought..." To share a story, not to tell them what to do with that, but just to create some awareness of what a story like that could mean, and let them pick out the ah-hahs from the power of a story.

Bill: And again, I think the caution that we gave earlier is, you're mission to keep it short really helps ensure that we don't make it about us, we don't shift the focus on us, and we want to be sure that we don't follow the example of Aesop, where we tell a story, and then at the end of the story, we say, "And the moral of the story is, or the point is, or what you should learn from that is..." We certainly don't to stop short of that. We just tell a story. Think about this, telling a story, we've used some judgement already. We've determined this might be appropriate. We've already interjected just a little bit of judgement, so we have to be extra cautious not to draw the conclusions, but to just offer back to them

the story for them to determine what, if anything, to do with it.

Brian: So, let's finish up with some cautions here. One caution, don't be afraid.

Bill: I know that when we first start out coaching training, in our own coach training, we tell people, be afraid. Make the pendulum. We're so used to sharing our self. We're so used to it being about us, us giving the solutions, us giving the insight. So, we try to get people to swing that pendulum the other way and get away from that, and now we're kind of saying, all right, now that you've kind of got that mindset, now that you've rid yourself, hopefully, of a good bit of agenda, now don't be afraid to let that pendulum swing back just a bit and share a bit of your story when it's appropriate, when it's helpful without worrying that you're going to hijack the conversation.

Brian: Yeah, so the second one is no agenda. Being sure, I assume, that you're not telling the story to infer a solution.

Bill: Yeah, here's what we don't want to do. We don't want to infer a solution. We don't want to imply, with a wink and a nod, you do what you want with this, but this is how it really should happen.

Brian: Smart people do this.

Bill: Yeah, that's right. We want to make sure in the telling of the story, we're not doing that, but we also don't want the story to build us up. We don't want the story to make us look like wow, we've got it figured out, what's wrong with you? Our stories could do that even subconsciously, so that's a caution. Don't imply anything about a solution in any story. Don't tell the story in any way that builds you up, and don't draw conclusions for people.

Brian: The third caution is make sure you hand back the application to the client.

Bill: Give it back. Let them draw the conclusions. What learning, what truth, if anything comes from it. Be intentional and be careful about that because we can, in our words, in our tone, we can say with the actual words, "This is up to you what to do," but in our tone, and in our expressions, and in our posture, we can really be sending silent signals that you need to do what I just said. You need to do what I just said. You've got to go overboard in being cautious about that.

Brian: I just think this is a good word. It's definitely informing my own coaching, Bill, and I appreciate you taking time to share this with us.

Bill: Yes sir. It's always good to be with you, and good to share a little bit more insight into how to change people's lives through coaching.

Brian: We want to thank the audience for joining us. This podcast was sponsored by our certificate in leadership coaching. It's a nine month, ICF approved, coach training program that will prepare you to coach those around you, to set goals, take action, and reach new levels of success. We have a cohort forming in April, so if you're interested, go to our website at www.coachapproachministries.org/coachnow. We'll see you next week.

[Outro Music]