

Coach Approach Ministries

presents the



Beginner's Guide

to Christian Coaching



How to have powerful conversations
that really make a difference

The Beginner's Guide to Christian Coaching

How to Have Powerful Conversations
That Really Make a Difference

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The Time Is Ripe for Coaching

Over the past couple of decades coaching – or a coach approach – has emerged as an effective way to help others move forward in work, faith, and life. From the corporate boardroom to the kitchen table, leaders have discovered coaching to be a powerful approach to helping clients, co-workers, friends, and family get clear on just where they want to go, and how they can get there.

For over ten years, we at Coach Approach Ministries have been a part of the coaching movement. We are sincerely devoted to modeling coaching and training leaders in this approach within the faith community. With this short eBook, we hope to introduce you to Christian coaching so you can begin recognizing some the benefits in your own life, work, and ministry.

One of the first questions you might raise is a common one we hear: Why has coaching become so popular? Let's invest this first chapter describing the conditions and context that have given rise to coaching and the coach approach.

The 20th Century witnessed a lot of what was called “industrialization,” with almost endless processing, proceduralizing, mechanization, and homogeneity. In an effort to produce more stuff at cheaper prices, we stopped tailoring goods and started mass-producing products. Not only were our cars built on assembly lines, but similar processes were also applied to everything from shoes to food to personal development. Modernity saw the demise of uniqueness and diversity and the rise of McDonalds, sweatshops, and particleboard furniture—all in the name of efficiency, conformity and predictability.

The effects of all this industrialization were manifold. Items became cheaper to produce and to own, but our powers of discernment about what to own diminished. Our society got sucked into a paradigm of “more” over and against a paradigm of “good.” When it came to personal development, being *more developed* at the cost of

well developed led to lockstep training programs, end of grade testing and one-size-fits-all approaches.

When it comes to personal and professional development, the industrial approach treats everyone the same by running everyone through the same process aimed at turning out a leader, or a husband, or a mother, or whatever. But people are not developed the same way cars or hamburgers are manufactured. The industrial approach has reached its limits!

In the past few decades, we have reached the edge and the end of the industrial approach to personal and professional formation. The one-size-fits-all approach has been revealed to be more like a one-size-fits-none approach and people are clamoring for personal development that is, well, *personal*.

The truth is that most people do not respond well to be treated like widgets. Instead of being stamped out as if produced by a cookie-cutter, we find that most people prefer an organic and individualized approach. Indeed, in our work with organizations and leaders (both within and outside of the church), we find several principles to be fairly universal:

- People really don't do what you tell them to do
- There is something inside each of us that values our own ideas and solutions more than we value the ideas pushed on us by others
- The one-size-fits-all mentality ignores the uniqueness of God's creation within each of us
- "Buy-in" is much harder to achieve than "ownership"
- For one person to "buy-in," another has to be selling
- We have "ownership" of that which we create
- Low ownership leads to low accountability.

All of this adds up to create a desire in people to have a customized personal development process that isn't about training, telling, teaching so much as it's about discovering, drawing out, and asking.

So how can we help people grow if we are not going to tell them what to do or treat everyone the same? The answer is coaching.

Simply put, coaching is a new way. A coach-approach allows us to help others move forward to the places they want/need to go in the way that will be most effective for the individual. Coaching is customization at its best.

Coaching Works – Here’s Why

If some of the old ways of working with others is not having the effect that we’d like how does taking a coach approach change that? Why are people responding to coaching?

We believe that coaching has gained traction for a number of reasons, including:

- Others really do have it in them to know where they want to go and what it will take to get there
- “People don’t wash rental cars” (we’ll explain this below)
- When we draw out what is inside others rather than try to get them to buy what we have in ourselves, we open the door to more effective solutions

Coaching works because coaches believe in others... in their abilities, their creativity, their motivation. Coaches believe that we are each the experts in our own life and that inside each of us lie the solutions to knowing where we want to go and the very best way for us to get there. As Christian coaches, we understand that the source of that ability, creativity and motivation is the Holy Spirit. We know that God has created each of us with a unique set of skills, gifts, talents, preferences, and desires – and that a coach-approach recognizes that uniqueness and draws it out in discovering where to go and how to get there.

Coaching also works because we are all are much more likely to take care of our own “stuff” than we are others’ “stuff”—**including our ideas.**

Let’s use a metaphor to explain this sense of ownership and taking care of things. Consider the last time you rented a car. While you might happily make use of a rental car when the need arises, you are not apt to take care of it the way you do your own vehicles. Unless you are very unusual, you will not check the oil, or take it in for maintenance...and you certainly won’t wash the rental car!

The reason we don't take care of others' stuff is *not* because that stuff doesn't have any value. Each of us does a fair bit of traveling, typically renting a car 8-10 times a year. Almost every time one of us rents a car, it is a newer model with relatively few miles than the cars we own and drive personally. Most rental cars have all kinds of fancy features that weren't even invented when our 10-year-old cars rolled off the assembly line. Objectively speaking, pretty much any rental car is "more valuable" than the any of the cars sitting in our driveways. But we can tell you with certainty that each of us takes great care of our respective cars. We make sure to pay attention to the maintenance schedule, we keep it clean, and we don't abuse the engine or the tires. And we do all these things because we own the car. Those rental cars are objectively more valuable than our cars, but they aren't more valuable to each of us. This same dynamic that is true of cars is even more true when it comes to our ideas, and this same dynamic is true for you as well.

Coaches understand this mindset and realize that people don't do what they are told – they do what they tell themselves to do. So coaches help people tell themselves what to do in a more focused, intentional way.

Coaches also understand that when we take a coach-approach to helping others move forward the possibilities for "how" are endless – bound only by the other person's creativity, motivation, and uniqueness. When we tell people what to do, we are limited by our OWN understanding of the issue. That requires us to be experts, not only in the subject at hand, but in the other person. If I come up with a solution for what you should do, I am limited by the options I can think of and by my assumptions about what you can and should do.

But when I take a coach-approach to help you figure things out, you aren't dependent on my expertise. You aren't limited by my understanding of the situation. As your coach, I help YOU to tap into your expertise, your creativity, your understanding of the situation and of yourself. As a coach I know the possibilities for a great solution won't be limited by my insight or understanding.

Start with a Coaching Mindset

There are two aspects to coaching: the mindset and the skill set. The mindset is how you think while the skill set is what you do. In this chapter, let's look at what's required to have a coaching mindset.

As we've trained coaches, we've encountered a few who want to use the skills of coaching without first changing the way they think. This approach really is a recipe for disaster. One pastor had the proverbial light bulb moment and he burst out in class, "Oh, I get it! Asking questions and listening gets people to think my idea was really their idea!" Obviously, he did *not* get it. The biggest reason he didn't get it was that he was stuck in old thinking – specifically, he could not let go of the notion that to be helpful he had to have the answers. Coaching requires new thinking.

Taking a coach approach starts with shifting our thinking. A problem is that we tend not to think about how we think. We just do stuff without considering the thought processes that led us to do it. And then we wonder why we keep getting the same results we've been getting! So let's think about our thinking for a few minutes.

When we talk about having a coaching mindset, we are really talking about how we think, or our beliefs.

The light bulb pastor mentioned above wanted to change his behavior, but doing so would likely get him results similar to those he was currently experiencing since his total approach had not really changed much. Most importantly, he was still relating to others in the same way he had before: as a salesman. He also still believed that he had the answers while others needed his answers.

Beliefs are what we hold to be true about ourselves, others, the world, and the way things operate. To get you started on taking a coach approach, here are six shifts you'll need to make in your beliefs.

6 Shifts in Belief

FROM	TO
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I understand things better than the other person does	I have some information and the other person has other information
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My goal is to get the other person to think the way I think	My goal is to understand and help the other person clarify
---	--

Conversations must end with all or nothing	Change is a contextual process that unfolds over an undefined amount of time
--	--

To be helpful, I must maintain control or else disengage the conversation	To be helpful, I must engage without being in control
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I must maintain a mindset of evaluation and serve as critic to what the other person says	I must maintain a mindset of curiosity and openness to what the other person says
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People change when they get the right information	People grow when they recognize truth more clearly and are motivated to change
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Let's be honest, changing the way you think is not easy. We believe what we believe because we have believed it for a long time. When you first start coaching, you'll find yourself bumping into and up against old beliefs constantly. When that happens, be sure to celebrate because that means you're stretching, growing, and trying something new. Coaching will not be easy at first, but over time you will start to shift your way of thinking and as you do it will become much easier.

Add a Coaching Skill Set

Taking this coach approach also involves using some key skills. We could easily come up with a list of twenty to thirty coaching skills, but since this is a beginner's guide, let's keep it simple and mention just three of the most crucial set of coaching skills: listening, questioning, and guiding the process.



Let's briefly look at each one of these skills.

Listening

To truly help another person discover new insights and solutions, coaches first listen. In fact, coaches are masterful listeners. We mainly listen for the purpose of knowing what questions will help the person continue their thinking. Coaches listen on behalf of the other person.

Coaches don't listen in order to figure things out. We don't listen to gather data or to find opportunities to offer our insights or thinking. Coaches listen in order to understand what is important to the other person right now. We listen to know

what question might lead to a new insight or “aha.” Listening is the very heart of coaching and is a skill we can all learn to do more effectively.

Questioning

Coaches also ask questions. We ask questions for the purpose of getting the other person to continue thinking: to go deeper and to keep digging for that new insight. Coaches don’t ask questions to learn new information; as with listening, we ask questions on the other person’s behalf. Coaches ask questions so that the other person can think about their situation in a way they haven’t before. Through our questions we aim to create some new awareness.

In order for our questions to facilitate some new insight or discovery, coaches ask questions that are:

- Open-ended rather than closed
- Simple and concise rather than complicated or compound
- Asked out of curiosity rather than from a place of judgment

Open-ended questions are a way to get the other person to keep thinking and exploring. Closed-ended questions can shut down the other person and tend to limit that exploring and thinking to only the options the coach has considered.

Simple questions are powerful – in fact, the simple they are, the more power they have. When our questions are long, and convoluted, they tend to distract the other person and they are often aimed at showing how smart we are. Concise questions that come out of what the other person has said (rather than what the coach has thought about) lead to true insights and new discoveries.

Curious questions serve the client by inviting them on a journey of discovery. Curious questions also make it safe to explore, to not know, and to experiment as a way of finding out. Judgmental questions put the person being coached on the

defensive, make the person feel like they should already know, or cause them to shut down. Coaches use questions to support, to draw out and to discover, not to interrogate.

Guiding the Process

We listen and ask questions in the context of conversations. And coaches don't just have good conversations; we have great, intentional conversations. As we guide the process, each encounter with those we coach – each conversation – is aimed at getting to some new insight that is expressed through some new action.

Coaches are very intentional about the kinds of conversations we have. We get clear on exactly what the other person wants to get from the conversation and then we purposefully listen and ask the right questions to help them get to that goal. Coaches help other people move from talk to commitment: the right actions that the other person has identified that will help them move toward their goals.

One way to envision a coaching conversation is to imagine the shape of an hourglass and let that shape represent the three movements of a great coaching conversation.

At the beginning of the conversation, things are wide open and the coach invites the person to pick one topic on which to focus. The first part (up to half) of the conversation involves *narrowing* to the real focus of the topic.

Once the person being coached discovers the point of focus, the coach guides the conversation toward a broader, *expanding* time during which new options are considered and new solutions are brainstormed.



When enough options and solutions have been considered, it's time to *narrow* things back down in order to nail down specific actions and clear takeaways.

As you can see, the coach doesn't just let these three movements happen; the coach guides the process so that the most helpful kind of conversation can take place.

When you combine great listening, powerful questioning and skillful guidance, you can coach just about anyone on any topic!

The Benefits of Coaching

What happens when a person works with a coach? We often talk about those who are coached reaching their goals, moving forward, or making progress. The way they make progress is by figuring out where they want to go, what it will take to get there, and then finding the motivation and commitment to do what it takes.

Our friend and CAM colleague, Jane Creswell, MCC describes the outcome of coaching as seven benefits. In her diagram (below) the benefits start at the bottom and build upon one another toward the top.

Benefits of Coaching

Coaching Others	God-sized Goals	
Intentional Progress		
Clarity/Focus	Confidence	Learning
Orienting Around Strengths		

When we coach someone, we draw out and help them discover their strengths: the talent, skill, knowledge and passion that are unique to them. When they orient around their strengths instead of trying to copy the strengths or style of someone else, they gain clarity/focus on what's really important, they gain confidence, and they boost their learning because they are self-motivated to do that which comes natural to them. All of this leads them to make intentional progress in their life, in their work, in their ministry and in their relationships. Out of this progress, they set and reach God-sized goals and they often end up coaching others. You can learn more about the benefits of coaching in Jane's book, [Christ-centered Coaching: Seven Benefits for Ministry Leaders](#).

What Makes This Christian Coaching?

There are plenty of coaches in the world. The largest professional coaching organization in the world, the International Coach Federation, has well over 20,000 members and there are at least 20,000 more professional coaches who are not members. And these numbers do not include people who coach as part of their job or as a ministry and don't consider themselves to be "professional coaches." As you might imagine, not all of these coaches are Christians. So what makes Christian coaching distinct?

In our view, Christian coaching is not just Christians doing coaching. On the other hand, Christian coaches do many of the same things that non-Christian coaches do. What's important is that Christians coach as part of our desire to be faithful stewards and to express the kingdom of God. In other words, we approach coaching from a very specific perspective: a Christ-centered perspective.

When coaching is practiced from a Christian theological framework, it provides a powerful expression of our faith, one that impacts the world for kingdom good. In a sense coaching is a real-life means of living out our faith according to a set of key Christian beliefs such as:

- Preferred Future – there is a God-sized goal to which we each can aspire
- Unique Creation – each of us has been created with individual gifts, passions, talents, and desires that reflect the image of our Creator
- Sanctification – We have a desire to “be better” that comes from our call to be imitators of Christ who experience the abundant and ever-increasing new life found in Christ
- Stewardship – we are made and redeemed to bear fruit, to make the most of what God has given us, and to live into the potential that is unique to each of us
- Trinity – humans thrive in relationship and we need relationships (including the relationship of a coach) to be our best, do our best, and experience the best God has called us to

Coaching is not the only thing Christians should do. We need to be willing and able to coach, counsel, mentor, advise, teach and train. But for many coaching is a central aspect of how they show up in the world and how they engage those around them.

Coaches follow some pretty good biblical principles when they:

- Believe in the worth, value and uniqueness in others
- Trust that the Holy Spirit is at work
- Ask questions aimed at getting the other person to see things in ways they hadn't seen them before (but not necessarily the way the coach sees them)
- Hold as an agenda the other person's forward movement
- Strive to engage others without needing to control them
- Remain curious about where God is at work in the lives of others and what their next step is

A theology of coaching is more fully developed in [Faith Coaching: A Conversational Approach to Helping Others Move Forward in Faith](#), by Chad Hall, Bill Copper, and Kathryn McElveen.

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If you'd like to know more about coaching or perhaps to be trained as a coach, we want to hear from you. Please get in touch with us and let us know how we can support you in your journey toward using coach in your work, ministry, home life, and friendships. You can reach us:

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