



Coach Approach Ministries Podcast

Episode 3: Creating Solutions People Own

Published: February 29, 2016

Brian Miller: Episode #3: Creating solutions people own.

Bill Copper: And so I would come up with a solution, and then the burden would be on me because it didn't work, and I felt this sense of responsibility.

[Intro Music]

Brian: Welcome to the *Coach Approach Ministries Podcast*. Coaching is a skillset and a mindset that helps people find focus, discover options, and take action. At CAM, we train the very best Christian coaches in the world, and over the last decade, we've trained well over a thousand coaches. Through this podcast, we want to share insights from the coaching community and help you to develop a broader understanding of coaching. You can find out more about us at www.coachapproachministries.org and sign up for our proven coach training.

Bill Copper drives many of the training programs within Coach Approach Ministries, and provides much of the day to day management of the ministry. In addition, Bill is Chief Operating Officer for Internal Impact, a coaching consulting company focused on helping people and organizations thrive through coaching, mentoring, training, and consulting. Bill has received certification from the National Association of Church Business Administration as well as the Professional Certified Coach credential from the International Coaching Federation. He frequently writes, speaks, and coaches around areas of business management for non-profits. He also provides coach training for churches, judicatories, and various organizations. Bill lives in Daytona Beach, FL.

So glad to welcome Bill Copper, Executive Director of Coach Approach Ministries and my partner. I am so thrilled. Bill has just been a real mentor to me, a real encouragement to me, and I owe him a lot. Don't let him know that, though, because it goes to his head. We don't want him to feel that way, but welcome Bill.

Bill: Great to be with you Brian. I do accept most major credit cards, so whatever you owe me, we can definitely work it out.

Brian: I'll need a payment plan with you, my friend. There's no doubt. That's going to be a requirement. No, so I wanted to talk to you about how you got started in coaching. I've heard some of the stories before. Give us a little history of where you started.

Bill: Yeah. I was in church administration working at a church in North Carolina, and the denomination, our local denomination, there in that state, acquired and began to develop a leadership development retreat center in our area. So they brought someone in to develop that center, develop the programming and so forth, and he moved to town, and they joined the church, and I got to know them. So when he, about a year later, got moved up in the organization, he recruited me to come out and run the leadership center. So I, the director at the Hollifield Leadership Center there in North Carolina for several years, and when I came out, one of the things that was part of a programming there, was coach training.

We were training Christian coaches at the time, specifically, for a church redevelopment process that the convention was working with. The convention, at the time, had hired Jane Creswell and Linda Miller to come in and develop their coach training program. They wanted some master certified coaches to make sure that the coaches they were training was top-notch, and honestly, Brian, I took the classes when I first came to work there just because I thought I should. I felt like I was going to be out promoting the programming of the center and talking about it with folks around the states. So I took the classes to see what it was all about. It was a big part of what we did.

Brian: Now hang on a second. I want to slow down a second and dive a little deeper here. So you were more of an administrative pastor, more of an exec kind of pastor, systems guy.

Bill: Yeah, my background is in business management, and so I was the church administrator, still am a certified church business administrator, and still play that role doing some administrative stuff for Coach Approach Ministries and other organizations, so that was in my background.

Brian: I mean there's different... My background's more pastoral after 20 years, and Chad more professorial, so there's all kinds of different ways that people come to this point of coming into coaching. So you transitioned out of that. You went to work for the denomination, and did you have any experiences pre-coaching that kind of fed into your coaching ah-ha's?

Bill: Good question. In fact, you were just saying that we all came into it from kind of a different place, but my sense is that the same dynamic was going on for all of us, and in my case, working for the denomination, I was in some ways, many ways, a consultant around different topics, and so as a denominational guy, I'd travel across the states and meet in an area with a group of pastors, or a group of leaders from a particular geographic area, and they'd say, "Well, here's what we've got going on. Here's our challenges that we face."

I'd sit around the table, and listen to them, and jot notes down on my notepad, and nod as though I knew exactly what they were talking about, and I would listen and pretty soon I would write down a few things, and I would make a recommendation and say, "If you did these four or five things, that would probably help," and they would look at them and say, "Oh Bill, that's great. This is just what we needed. Man, thanks a lot." We would all shake hands, usually go eat somewhere, and then I would get back in my car and head back across the state home, and usually about half way home, I would start worrying, wondering whether I'd told them the right things or not and get this almost sick belly ache, carrying with me this burden of, "Oh I hope I told them the right things."

And then honestly, by the time I got home, I realized, they're not going to do any of it anyway. So I stopped worrying, and Brian, that happened over, and over, and over. People don't do what they're told.

Brian: So describe your feelings there a little bit. First of all, you had a pit in your stomach you told them the wrong thing. Talk about that feeling a little bit.

Bill: We've all done that even when we kind of slip up in our coaching, and we start telling people what to do. There's this doubt that creeps in. Almost a burden that we carry. Did we come up with the right solution or not? Almost a sense of responsibility. For someone else's stuff because we came up with the solution.

Brian: And you do that as parents, you make a decision. You don't say anything, but you think, "I don't know if that was right or not."

Bill: As I said, as you and Chad came into coaching from different places, that same dynamic was true in your pastor role and the stuff that Chad was doing. People counted on me to tell them, "Well here's what you ought to be doing," and gosh, that's a burden, and then, what comes with the burden is a sense of frustration because I then was not responsible for carrying it out, and so I would come up with a solution, somebody else would not carry out the solution, and then the burden would be on me because it didn't work, and I felt this sense of responsibility.

Brian: Now, the other feeling you described was by the time you got home, and it must have been a long trip, or maybe it wasn't, you realized, "It doesn't even matter cause they're not going to do it anyway." What did that feel like?

Bill: That was less burdensome and more frustrating. It's just frustrating knowing that you really weren't making much of a difference. In terms of effect, now I came up with some brilliant stuff, don't get me wrong.

Brian: I believe you.

Bill: My stuff was good.

Brian: I know. I know it was.

Bill: But what we have all learned, and what's true of me, is that we don't do what other people think we ought to do. No matter how good it is, we do what we tell ourselves to do, and those were the beginnings... That kind of set me up for when I began to learn about coaching, I was right for it, and it really began to resonate with me quickly.

Brian: And I don't know if this happened to you, but how did it begin to make you feel about the people you were consulting?

Bill: My initial thoughts were the way it made me feel about me, and that was, "Am I not capable? Am I not smart enough to come up with good answers? Is the problem just that I'm not experienced enough?" Then it also made me feel negatively, often times, about other people. I judged them because they weren't doing what they were told. They weren't following up on this brilliant idea I just gave them. It just led to a frustration, a dynamic there where I first was unsure of myself and my solutions, and then I became unsure of them because they didn't follow up.

Brian: Well, it can have the exact opposite too, and anybody that's part of any kind of denominational tribe, or I think, even business, we'll say, they know this to be true. That you get to a point where you think, "We have the dumbest denominational leaders. They come in here, they don't have any idea what they're talking about. They give us some stuff and it doesn't work." It creates a dynamic both ways. It creates an us-them. It creates a division.

Bill: And I used to hear them say those things about other denominational workers, and of course, after a while, I realized that's how they feel about all of us.

Brian: I know it. So you didn't take this coach training on purpose. It was really by accident, and you didn't talk about... Well how did the denomination decide to call in Jane Creswell and Linda Miller? Do you know how that came about?

Bill: Yeah, George Bullard had developed a congregational redevelopment process. It called for the use of coaches to work with the church denominational body rather than a consultant, an old consultant model. George had a, I kind of described it as a, chip on his shoulder about how the church was often seen as second best in providing services that could also be found out there in the world. So if you want good financial advice, you call those experts from the world to come into the church and tell us what to do. If you want good strategic planning, you call some business strategic planner to come in and tell you what to do, and yeah, you could get that kind of training in your local church. You could have a church workshop on financial planning. You could have a church workshop on budgeting, but it was, I don't know, it was always seen as not quite as good.

Brian: There was definitely a period of church history, recent church history, where anything corporate was the way to go. The CEO Pastor... Right, right.

Bill: And from a time frame perspective, this is all happening in the early 2000's, 2001, 2002. Not that far back, you know. So that was going on, and also, coaching was fairly new in its infancy, and there were a lot of folks calling themselves coaches, and calling what they did coaching.

Brian: Still today.

Bill: And that still happens today. So George, at the time, wanted to distinguish what we were doing with coaching from what everybody else was calling coaching and to make it top-notch. We had a great leadership development center there. We provided world class leadership training and wanted the coaching to follow suit, and that was the impetus for bringing in these master coaches.

Brian: So Jane and Linda, just give us a brief... Not everyone's going to know who they are. I know who they are, they're rock stars.

Bill: Sure, they were both a couple of the founding partners here with us as Coach Approach Ministries. Jane Creswell was the former coach at IBM, was the first internal coach at IBM and helped develop that network and has since been working both in the church world, and in the corporate world, in creating coaching cultures within the organization. Linda Miller works with the Ken Blanchard companies, you know, One Minute Manager folks, the Situational Leadership folks, as their global coaching coordinator. So she goes all over the world helping companies develop leaders through coaching, and they were a couple of the original master certified coaches with, some of the early ones, with the International

Coach Federation, and so quite well qualified to come in and develop that training program that has really served as the foundation for a lot of the training that we have developed since then.

Brian: So you came in, and I don't want to put words in your mouth or describe you in a way, but you came in, you're glad to take the class, it's something they're offering. You need to know about it, so you can sell it, but you have no idea that this is about to change your life.

Bill: Oh Lord no. I thought I was coming in to manage a facility and the operation of this facility and was good at that and loved it, and it was an awesome place, and again, I went in to the coaching just cause we did that and I thought I should, and honestly, when I took that first class, I thought, "These are some good principles, and these will help me in my management of other people. I certainly will never become a coach or anything like that, but these are good principles. This is good stuff." What happened was that we were matched, each of us in that original training, with a mentor coach.

So I was matched. My very first coach was Perry Rue, who a lot of the folks will know about. Perry was a coach with IBM at the time, in fact, was up until just about a year ago when he took early retirement, and we got on that very first call, and I thought to myself, "We'll do a little role play here kind of like we did in the class, and I'll just pick up some pointers on this," and probably ten minutes into the call, Perry stopped and said, "Hey, you're making this up, aren't you?" And I said, "Well yeah." He says, "We're not doing that. We're not role playing here. What are some of the real issues that you want to deal with and be followed with?" And so, because of his insistence, I came up with a real topic, and honest to goodness, before that 45 more minutes was up, I had an actual solution to a real issue that I'd been kind of wrestling with and dealing with.

It opened my eyes more than just the training had done. So I went into a period of a few months of being mentor coached by Perry, and each time got more and more progress and got more and more to believe in it and still never thought I would actually coach, but I thought, "I could sure see the benefit in this." Then a local pastor in the area called me, and he had been to some of our training, leadership development workshops, and different speakers that had come in, that were not necessarily coach related, and I talked to him a few times, and he calls me one day, and he says, "Hey. Do you know anything about this coaching stuff I've been hearing about?" And I said, "Well of course I do. Are you kidding me?"

Brian: I'm cutting edge.

Bill: I'm a trained coach, and I'm right on top of this stuff, and we talked about it just a little bit, and he said, "Well, could you coach me?" And I thought, "Uh-oh. I've let my mouth talk myself into something." So we talk about it a little bit, and I made sure he realized I was really new at this, that he would be my first, but that I would be willing to try it, and he said, "Well I'm not going to pay you, so it'll be worth whatever I get." Oh, Brian, from the very first time. Now, I obviously didn't do it perfectly the first time, but I was able to stumble my way through to him coming up with a solution that I didn't recommend, and that from the very first time, I noticed that difference from that feeling that we talked about earlier, from feeling responsible, feeling that burden of having come up with the solution, and I didn't feel that, and I thought, "Wow. Boy, this feels a whole lot better."

Brian: What did you feel?

Bill: Well, I felt like, “Man, I have played a role here in watching someone else solve a problem,” and so it wasn’t passive, I was just watching, but I played a role in it, in helping him think through some things, and what he came up with was something I had never encountered before. I had no personal experience with it, and maybe that was a blessing for me because I wasn’t tempted to weigh in with an answer. There was almost an exhilaration to think, “Wow, so that’s how this feels.” Then on top of that, even though the folks I was talking about before who after I come up with a solution would say, “Man, great. That’s just what we need,” they’re excitement lasted about 12 minutes until I got my to-go cup of sweet tea and got on the road. Then, I never heard from them again. They never did any of it again, but in this case, not only was this client plain excited about what he had come up with, but man, you could just feel this burden lifted off of him.

He now had... I mean we didn’t solve the Mid-East peace crisis that day, but we solved a crisis for him. So the next day I heard from him, and he was still excited about it, and he was still following up and taking that next step. Then he actually, Brian, he actually did it. He actually did what he said he was going to do, and man, I can remember just kind of almost a fist pump when he shared with me how it went, and I was like, “Yes! Wow! There’s something to this.”

Brian: Was he surprised?

Bill: I don’t know. I think he had heard about coaching and certainly along the way, we coached for quite a long time, for years after that off and on, but consistently after that for several more months, and there were times when he tried to lean on me for advice and counsel. “What would you do here?” And I managed that better some times than others, but for the most part, we kept coming back to, “What are you going to do?” And he always acknowledged, “Yeah, that always works out better for me.” I think he was surprised a little bit, but the solution he came up with was something that was not just totally out of the blue. It was in there. There was something that kept him from articulating it and being committed to it.

Brian: I love hearing you go from something in the pit of your stomach to almost like it doesn’t even matter to exhilaration, and I know that feeling from going from... There’s a great place for pastoral counseling, but I’d always leave ready to go to Cracker Barrel and fill up because I was drained and tired, and now, when I get done coaching, I feel like I drank a Red Bull or something, which I never have, so I don’t know what that feels like.

Bill: I know what you mean.

Brian: I’m just so exhilarated. That’s a great word, great word. So with that all in your history, where’s this taking you forward?

Bill: Well, since that time, that day coaching was something that I was trying out and testing. As my career there developed, it became a larger and larger part of my role there. I began to be responsible for a good bit of our programming. I did more coaching. I did more training. Now four years ago, next month, I left that role with the denomination and began working with Coach Approach Ministries full time, and what I realize was that my calling is to equip other people to serve, and I bet that was expressed through church administration at one point. Now, the season I’m in, it’s been expressed through training and coaching others. I call it whole sale ministry instead of retail.

And I can see how it has just grown into not only what I do and how I express things, but in who I am. My everyday conversations with people take on that approach. I mean think about other relationships that you have now, and instead of being the answer person and being frustrated when people don't do what they're told, now you're the one who draws out from them. It's changed my relationship with my boys, with a number of my friends. It just has become who I am. It's hard for me to see forward anyway to continue serving in my role and follow my calling that wouldn't include coaching and this approach.

Brian: Well, it's an Ephesians 4 calling, you know, apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers to equip the body for service. I mean, that's a role... The word coach isn't in the biblical text, but there's that great sense of development of the body, especially of the leaders that I've sensed that calling as well for a long time, and this is a great tool to do it.

Bill: One of our friends and colleagues, Eddie Hammond, who was part of those early efforts in coach training there at the leadership center, been in ministry a long time, and he talks about coaching as a process and approach that bore more fruit, more quickly, than anything he had ever been involved in, and I think that's a good way to put it. It's a great approach, it bears fruit, and it does so quickly, and it bears fruit that lasts, and that probably adds to the sense of fulfillment we have as a coach.

Brian: And something you talked about was at first, you were coached, and that's when you really learned the power of coaching by being coached, and then you started coaching, and then even built more upon that in the process, in the doing of it, in the being coached and the coaching. I love it.

Bill: As you say that, it reminds me how that's one of the principles that we try to express to people that are part of our community, and that is if you think that coaching and being a coach is for you, you certainly ought to be coached. You ought to benefit from coaching. If it's good enough for others, it's certainly good enough for you for the same reasons. So I learn about coaching... Every time I receive coaching from one of you guys or from some of the coaches, I learn more about coaching, and it helps me to be a better coach to the folks that I coach as well.

Brian: It just puts me in a coaching mindset not so I can coach, but it puts me in a coaching mindset... Well the word I'm thinking of lately is execute. I can get more done, I'm more focused, because I'm being coached.

Bill: Yeah I think that's one of the advantages, one of the benefits of receiving coaching.

Brian: He for me right now. Bill, I really appreciate you taking this time and telling us your story.

Bill: I look forward to the next time we can connect, and we'll continue the journey together.

Brian: Sounds good. Thanks Bill.

Bill: Thanks. Take care.

[Outro Music]

Brian: If you would be interested in the type of training that moved Bill from consultant to coach, please check us out at www.coachapproachministries.org.