



Coach Approach Ministries Podcast
Episode 4: Define Your Coaching Niche
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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 Chad Hall who's the president of Coach Approach Ministries and the executive director of Coach Approach Ministries, Mr. Bill Copper. How you guys doing today?

Chad Hall: Fine and dandy, Brian. How about yourself?

Brian: Hey, I'm doing great.

Bill Copper: Same here. Both fine and dandy.

Brian: At the beginning of each month, we like to issue a challenge to our community. This is kind of fun. We want not just to be here as a resource, but to set the agenda for our community as well, and we want to urge you to grow in an area of your coaching life, and this month, our challenge is defining your coaching niche. Let me describe that a little bit. As a beginning coach, my mantra was, "I can coach anybody about anything," and while coaching is easily applied in a lot of areas, it can really make it difficult for a potential client to realize the fact that you are who they're looking for. In a recent event we called "Coaching Breakthrough," Chad said, "Your coaching niche should be binary." For the less nerd-ish out there, binary simply means off or on. When a potential client hears your niche, they should have one of two responses. One, that sounds exactly like me, or two, that's not me at all, and yet, I find coaches are really hesitant to narrow their niche in fear of losing lots of possible clients, but it's the rare occasion that someone narrow their niche too far. So Chad, you brought this up in the first place about the binary side of niche, so get us started on this conversation on narrowing down your coaching niche.

Chad: Yeah, the binary thing in all of the niche emphasis that we give, it's truly about clarity, and for me, the bottom line is about clarity that serves the people that we would coach. So the confusion, it distorts, it distracts, it keeps people from being able to engage coaching and therefore, benefit from it, but having it be binary really creates this clarity where the person who comes across you in a conversation, or your website, or your business card, or your Facebook, wherever you're putting yourself out there, and they hear you talk about the people you coach and it's either on or off. It's super clear, and having that kind of niche and focus really helps a coach say, "Here's who I coach," and then all the people for

whom that applies, man, they're just going to say, "Yes, that's me. I may not be ready for coaching yet, but I know Brian coaches people like me." Whereas, I think a lot of times what we put out there, not only in coaching, but in a lot of other marketing is, we say, "Well this is kind of who I work with kind of around these things," and people get confused and they say, "Well I don't know if that's for me or not. So I'm just going to disengage." One of the guys I've learned a lot of this marketing stuff from is Donald Miller over in Nashville. I love the way he puts it. He says, "Our brains don't want to use calories," and so if you put confusing messages out there, it makes my brain work too hard. I'm having to use too many calories to try to find out do you coach people like me or do I know people you would coach? I don't know. Okay, I'll just stop, and we just go to something that's simpler, clearer, more easy to understand. So that's why it's so helpful to have a well-defined coaching niche. It just makes it easy for people to know that you work with people like them, or not.

Brian: I think the reason why people push back on that, maybe some of the training we give. As the coach I'm not the expert, so when I find a niche, it does seem to me like I'm saying, "Well you know what? I am an expert in this area." So how do you balance that out?

Chad: I think for most of the coaches that I see who are successful, they do have some expertise, or at least some familiarity in the niche where they coach. That's not the same thing as being the expert on what every person in that niche should do. It's just that, "Hey, I'm familiar with the territory." When I was just getting into coaching, one of the niches I had, and you can have more than one, you just have to be able to communicate it clearly, I did a lot of coaching with church planters. I was really clear that I'm familiar with the territory. You're not going to have to explain to me all the ins and outs of church planting. I get all that, but you also don't have to worry about me telling you how to plant a church because you're going to plant one that's different from the one that I planted. So was there some expertise? Yeah, but not expertise aimed at every single church planter that I was coaching. It's more just familiarity with the territory is how I look at it.

Brian: Yeah, Bill, once you told me that people don't buy coaching, they buy results, and that is really just stuck in my head. Although, it's hard too...It's something that not only sticks in my head, it's something I need to go back and apply and reapply. So what's that idea then? What does that have to do with coaching niche? To say people buy results, how's that connected?

Bill: I think in a couple ways, Brian. First to kind of tag into what Chad said. Two thoughts come to my mind. One is that man, I think Chad is dead on that you got to find that niche so people could know if they're in or out, but also, let's don't so narrowly define that that people self-select out that, really, we want to be in there. So you want to find that right balance in there. Get it narrow enough for people to say, "Yep, that's me," but not so narrow that they're nit-picking at whether they belong in there or not. When it comes to people not buying coaching but rather, buying the results of coaching, in addition to finding out what our niche is, who we're here to coach, we want to figure out what it is that we're solving for them. What are we coming alongside to help them do? And that's what they're going to buy. They're not going to buy me coaching them. They're going to buy them getting to some result. So I have to articulate who you are, and then help to help articulate, what is it that you're trying to get to, and how is it that this coaching's going to get that, and I think that's the connection to what you're talking about.

Brian: As I think about what you're saying, one thing that I think that I want to start out by saying is, you don't necessarily define your niche by what it is that your clients do. So if I said, I coach pastors, which I

have said for some time. I do coach a lot of pastors, but that's not necessarily a problem to solve. I hope it's not that pastoring is a problem to solve. There are problems within pastoring. There are problems to solve within all kinds of different work. So if I said I coach military personnel, or I coach I don't know what exactly, just a type of person, a title, I think that can miss that point. And I think we can learn from athletics here that more and more you're seeing in athletics, you may see a guy that says he's a football coach, but if you ask him more specifically, he is the line coach, or the strengths coach, or he is the special teams coach, so you're ending up in more of a niche specialty, and as we go back to what Chad was saying about binary, if I'm a football player, I need a football coach, but if I'm a quarterback, I don't need a line coach, but if I am on the line, and I hear someone say, "I'm a line coach." I know that's me. I know that I ought to at least be paying attention at this point. Chad, what would you add to that?

Chad: I think of a niche as three things. There's the person that you coach. There's the problem that you help them solve, and then there's the path forward that you are providing, and so if you don't have some clarity around those three, and it took me a long time to get those to all start with a P, by the way, so please appreciate that. There's the person. I coach pastors. That's good, but that's not clear enough. There's the problem. I coach pastor's that have multiple staff teams and really struggle with managing those staff. Now that's a problem, and the path forward is, I really helped them find their own leadership style and get comfortable leading staff in a way that works for them. That's a path forward, so that's a tight niche, and that wouldn't be the only niche you might have if you coached pastors, but if you don't hang it to some kind of problem... You know, I coach pastors whose churches are growing faster than they can keep up with. Okay, now I've got a person with a problem, and that person really knows, "Oh that's me or that's not me," and the path forward is that kind of thing that gives them hope. "Oh, Brian's a guy who could help me with my problem. He knows me. He gets me. He can help me." It's not a solution, really. It's how we're going to work together. I think that's what trips up a lot of coaches. To use your football coach similarity there, "Gosh, I could coach linemen, or quarterbacks, or defensive backs, or half backs"

Brian: Or soccer players. I coach athletes. It's funny. Nobody says, "I coach athletes."

Chad: Ping-pong players, I could coach ping-pong players.

Brian: I don't want to say that I coach any kind of athlete because I'm afraid that I might lose somebody, that there might be a soccer player that could really benefit from what I've got, but I hate to define it so far down to one sport or one position in a sport, but truly, those are the guys that get paid the highest for their coaching ability is the one who says, "I can make this goalie the best goalie out there."

Chad: And I think what I would look at is, I bet a lot of those, maybe like a line coach, could they be the offensive coordinator, which is a type of coach? Probably, yeah. They might even be able to coach the backs, or whatever. I don't really know enough football to know whether that's true or not. The idea is that they probably could coach, but would they be effective trying to do all of that at the same time? No. No. They're going to be the most effective, so when the lineman says, "Who's the guy I go to for help? Oh, it's the lineman coach, the offensive line coach. That's who I go to." Three years from now, for a different team, that same coach might be the defensive line coach. I don't know, but the idea is one specific kind of focus at a time, and I think, to Bill's point about it, let's not overly narrow it. I coach pastors of multi-staff congregations in the Florida Keys named Joe. You got two. You got two of those, maybe. We could narrow by the wrong factors, and that's where I see people may be overdoing it with

niching. They go into these really narrow niches. Those aren't a central or helpful identifiers for the clientele.

Brian: I think the first change is that the niche that... Because I've coached a lot of people, and so as I think about a lot of people that I've coached, well it's okay. It's a lot of pastors, but you know what really the niche is? The niche is people I know that like me and trust me. That's the first niche, but honestly, there's just a limited amount of people out there...

Chad: There are only four of us Brian.

Brian: ...that like me and know me and trust me. There's several, and I can do that for a while, but I also find that, and I don't know if you guys would agree with this or not, but I find that the people who are kind of the easy-pickings, who are happy to be coached and enjoy being coached, also really don't want to pay full price for coaching because they're doing what Bill said that I can't sell which is they're paying for coaching. They're not paying for results because I haven't defined what the results are. I'll just come along, I'll coach your topic, I'll get you some result, but they're not paying for results. They're literally paying for coaching. So if you want to break in to a place where you have so many clients that you don't know what to do with. Which, I think anyone who's coaching, that's what they want. They want clients. They want to have that client base out there to pull them in. So then you have to define a niche that's more narrow than maybe what you described, and then find a way to market it. We're not talking about how to market it in this podcast. Just that idea of narrowing your niche down, how did you say that? Down to a person, down to a problem, and down to a path forward. Bill, what would you interject here?

Bill: Well, I think I would agree with the two of you about how we need to communicate these niches. Remember, we may more than one niche. Defining our coaching niche does not necessarily keep us from coaching people, but it helps us to find, for communication purposes, where we can have our best impact. So us figuring out, who we're here to serve, what they need, and what the path said, as Chad said, the path forward for them. Used to be, in the old days, that coaching had a status attached to it. You were important enough to have a coach, and that was enough. You sell people on the fact that you're going to be their coach, but coaching is much more accessible now even to many people in the ministry context, and so we've got to really differentiate ourselves if we're going to get people to be our clients. We have to really articulate what the problem is we're going to help them solve and what the path is.

Brian: That's excellent. It's one thing to talk about it. It's another thing to apply it. I hear all this stuff, but as soon as I try to apply it, it's weird how murky it can get, how quickly it can just get back into this fog. So let me just kind of run out what I've been working on. I think I've coached all my friends at this point, you know? Which, my friends have good positions, and it's been good work. It's not like coaching my neighbor, but now I'm looking to widen that out, so I'm analyzing who it is that who it is that I coach. So we're starting with the first P you talked about there, Chad, the people. Now, the problem is that I've coached pastors. I've coached denominational leaders. I've coached non-profit leaders. I've coached educators, and not like Christian school educators, but public school educators, and I've enjoyed all that, but how do you put that on a card. I coach everybody who's not in a corporate job. Well I mean that's binary in one sense, but it just doesn't go on a card, and I really don't, Chad, I really don't want to say I coach pastors. I really don't want to limit myself to that, or just denominational folks, so I think the word that's come to my mind is leaders. I coach leaders, and as I say that, I can feel a little bit in me, yeah,

yeah, I would like to be coaching around leadership issues a lot. So is that my people? Is that my P there, Chad? Or do I need to go farther?

Chad: I would encourage you to push that a little farther. That's almost binary, for one. Most people, if you say, "Are you a leader?" Some people would find that murky. A lot of people would go to say yes or no. I think the direction I would push that to get greater clarity is I would find some kind of common thread that kind of ties those leaders together. Maybe they are values driven leaders, maybe they are servant leaders, maybe they are leaders in service of a great cause. There's some kind of modifier that would help a person say, "Oh yeah. That's the kind of leader I am. I'm not just in it for myself. I really care about this thing, and that's why I'm a leader," and that might give you a tighter kind of focus in terms of helping a person identify.

Brian: Yeah. That's helpful. As I think about the leaders that I want to coach, and one's I have coached in fact, they are typically, and I don't know if I planned this, but they're typically in transition. A lot of times they're in transition, thinking about what's next. Not even the next position, but the next hill, right? The next mountain they want to climb. Sometimes they're in transition. Sometimes it is just that... I would say something that would be binary about the leaders that I want to coach, is that they really want to see a change. They really want to see this thing happen, and they're willing to make a sacrifice. I guess I'm moving into the problem, but they're just not sure how to do it.

Chad: Yeah, it sounds to me like they are leaders on the grow. I probably agree with you to stay away from "leaders in transition." That kind of sounds like they left one job and they are now on to another.

Brian: Well you don't want to see your leader getting a transition coach.

Chad: "We hired a transition coach for our pastor, but he's still here!" Yeah, that's probably not the best. I'll tell you what comes to my mind too, Brian. One of my first mentor coaches was a guy named Scott Eblin, and Scott, during that time, his real niche was he coached leaders who had just gone to the next level. They were corporate typically, but they had been promoted to a level where what they had been doing wasn't going to work anymore. That's not your niche.

Brian: No, it's not.

Chad: But you kind of hear, "Oh that's a leader that got the general category of what person is this? It's a leader." Specifically, it was a leader that had just transitioned to the next level, and we're trying to figure out how to be successful at that new stage. I hear you talking about leaders who have probably been in their transition for a while, but they have a new passion for some kind of project, new chapter, new phase, new initiative. There's something that's kind of caught them and they're really stoked about it and kind of have a fire lit under them.

Brian: The fire-lit is the part, and they may not have been there very long at all, but the impact they want to make is right where they're at, and they're a little frustrated about it. They can't quite just get their finger on it. That's moving into the problem there. Can we move into the problem?

Chad: I hear that they're leaders who want to move faster than their organization is right now.

Brian: Oh my goodness. Leaders who want to move faster...

Chad: There's something there. You could play with that lingo, but that also I think, dovetails into the problem.

Brian: I'm wondering if they understand the problem. I think the problem is that the word leader, for me, it immediately connotes that they have a team, and I bet they don't, and if they do, it's not a very effective team, and so, that's where I'm asking the question. In the binary sense, I mean, I think it's best if they hear the problem and go, "That's exactly my problem," but do they already know that's their problem or do they hear it and say, "Oh, I didn't realize that's my problem, but that is definitely my problem." Are there nuance there?

Chad: I think that's it. Yeah, I think that's it. One of my favorite lines recently, I was at a writer's conference. I probably heard three different workshop leaders say this. Philip Yancy was one of them. He said, "Great writing, people hear it and they think, 'Oh. He put to words what I've been thinking and feeling.'" So there's a newness and a freshness, but there's also a familiarity to it, and I think what you want to do in describing the problem that these leaders face is it's going to resonate, it's going to feel familiar, but fresh at the same time, and that's actually going to help them trust that you're going to be able to help them because you put it into words, you get it, they don't have to explain it to you, you get it, and "Oh Brian can help me with this."

Brian: That's good. I think just describing this for other people. So the last part is the path forward, and I think what I offer would be, one thing I'll definitely help you do is help you develop your team, and I'll also help you think through what the next transition looks like. We'll definitely look at some things that will help you think about how to get the team fired up and moving forward. That's the solution. So your end result will be, you'll have an effective team and be moving forward. Is that enough, or does it need to be on the other side?

Chad: I don't know. Sometimes I think you might be too close to it.

Brian: I am too close to it.

Chad: This is why, by the way, it's helpful to have another person to think through it with you.

Brian: Oh my yes.

Chad: If I were a leader that you were going to coach, I'll tell you what I'd want from you. I'd want you to help me stay encouraged, solve one problem at a time, and create kind of a structure, or a culture, or a team, so that I wasn't doing this by myself over the long term. That's a path forward to me. That doesn't have to be exactly the way you'd put it, but those kinds of things where you can give me some handles. "Oh he's going to help me stay encouraged, solve one problem at a time, so I don't get overwhelmed. He's going to help me build a team so I have some partners in this." Oh, that's a path forward. In those kind of simple, almost simplistic terms of... And by the way, this is for everyone listening to the podcast who's a coach, the path forward does not include the word "coach." We will hunt you down. We will take away your coaching card. As Bill says, nobody buys coaching. They buy a solution. They buy their problems solved. They buy a result. We're so close to it, we think, "Of course how I'm going to help you is through coaching." That doesn't make sense to anybody else. Don't say that.

Brian: Right. That's why there's a middle ground there between the solution is that I'll provide coaching. You're saying I could provide some handles for them. Bill, what would you add to that as far as path forward?

Bill: Yeah, I think that's exactly right. That's what we've talked about when we talk about they buy the results of coaching. The path forward is the result. The path forward, in your example, as Chad said, I'm going to figure out how to do one thing at a time. I'm going to build a team around me. Those are results that they can expect from working with you as their coach, and people will buy that, and you can word smith that a little bit more to even put that in a bit more specific terms. What we know is, an awful lot of what we're going to do is we're going to coach. So this isn't about changing what you do with people, it's about how you communicate.

Brian: That's exactly right. This is wanting to have clients to coach. The old proverb says if you're a leader without any followers, you're just taking a walk. I've decided that if you're a coach without a client, you're just talking to yourself. We've got to have clients and the way to get them is to sell a result. Hey guys, thanks so much for joining me on this podcast. This challenge podcast and bringing this to the people out there. You can find out more about us by going to coachapproachministries.org and downloading our free eBook, *The Beginners Guide to Christian Coaching: How to Have Powerful Conversations that Really Make a Difference*. We'll see you next week.