



## Coach Approach Ministries Podcast

### Episode 6: How to Generate Great Coaching Topics

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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, president of Coach Approach Ministries and Bill Copper, the executive director of CAM. We are the leadership team of Coach Approach. Welcome guys.

**Chad Hall:** Hey Brian.

**Bill Copper:** Hey Brian. How you doing?

**Brian:** Doing good. Hey our topic today is topics, actually. We find this all the time as we train coaches, and if coaches can't come up with topics to get coached on very easily, I'm sure that coaches have this struggle with their clients. I don't know what to get coached on today. I still hear that all the time, and so I want to talk about some ways that we can help clients come up with topic quicker, more relevant topics, those kind of things. Here's how I want to start. This may be an interesting way to go, and it may not be an interesting way to go, but Chad, if I were to coach you right now and say, "What do you want to talk about?" what are five topics, not just one, but what are five topics that I could coach you about?

**Chad:** Wow. Not to put me on the spot, right? Five topics. I would have appreciated a little heads up on this. One would be a new project that I've started which is to do weekly blogging. I'd get coaching around how to keep the momentum going on that. That'd be a great topic. Another... I always think about relationships. What's a relationship that could be improved? That would actually be the topic, and we could go down the path of okay, which one's and then we'd settle on one, and I'd talk about improving a relationship. I would also get coached around some kind of habit that I would like to form, and right now in my life, that's to do a better job of habitually, I've started reading the psalter, the Lutheran psalter, every morning. Well, the habit is I want to read it every morning to help with my prayer life. So I'd get coaching around how to do that more than two times a week and up that. I'd get coaching around what's the next topic for the Sunday school class that I teach because that's a really important thing. Gosh, is that four or five?

**Brian:** Let's say it's four. One more.

**Chad:** You weren't counting, Brian.

**Brian:** I was not.

**Chad:** So one more. You know, probably some big goal that I have which I could make some progress toward. I'd have to think about what the big goal is. I have so many.

**Brian:** Yeah, that's true. In some ways, it's like wow, you had a ton of stuff to get coached on. I think some people just instantly say, "I don't even know. I don't have anything." What kind of boring life is that? I really don't believe it.

**Chad:** It's a perfect life. I don't need any coaching.

**Brian:** I don't believe it. Bill, what about you if you had five topics I could coach you about?

**Bill:** Yeah, you know. I got a little bit of a head start because I was thinking while Chad was coming up with his, and as I'm looking at mine, they've all got similar themes to them. One would be I have a wedding coming up. My oldest son is getting married, and I've got quite a bit of time I've got 10 or 11 months between now and then and so getting some coaching around how I can best prepare what he's going to need from me because his mother and I are divorced, how to navigate that dynamic. Probably be helpful to get some coaching around that. Another is my upcoming travel schedule. Just looking out over the next several weeks, and then if I add to that the next three months, I'm just on the go a bunch. I'm not sure if the coaching would reveal logistically how to manage that or philosophically how to put limits on that. I'm not sure exactly where the coaching might go there. I have an upcoming personal trip to New York City, and so I like to do a lot of planning, and getting things ready, and research and so forth, and I wouldn't mind getting some coaching around that. The next two are related to CAM. Really to begin dreaming about the next big thing. We kind of are on this rhythm of every few months dreaming about where things are going to be over the next several months. So I'd like to maybe do some brainstorming, coaching, around the next big thing with CAM, and then maybe the next topic would be one of those next big things, and that is getting some coaching around the logistics for our next Breakthrough event in the fall.

**Brian:** Those are great.

**Bill:** So it might be helpful to talk through those kind of things and make sure I get all the logistics covered.

**Brian:** It's interesting listening to you guys talk about your topics because, honestly, the first thing it does is it starts generating topics in my head for me. So I think that's actually really healthy to hear other people's topics and to get them out there because it makes...

**Chad:** Wait. Wait. Wait a minute, Brian. Wait a minute.

**Brian:** I escaped!

**Chad:** Turnabout is fair play. So if you're going to get coached today, what five topics would you get coached on?

**Brian:** Yeah. I've been thinking through exactly... One of our most recent podcasts was how to create a coaching niche, and I've really been thinking about honing that down, and I've been coached on it

several times already, but I think it is one of those topics that, literally, multiple coaching sessions can be a help to look at it a different way because it's so important that it just be a sharp blade, I guess, That that's an important topic for me. A second one would be, and this one just came out of Bill talking about travel. I tend to have a mindset that if I'm not sacrificing or working way too hard, that I'm not doing what I'm supposed to be doing, and I think that's a bad mindset, but it is a mindset. I can't just change my mind. I have to work my way out of that, and to get some new mind frames for that. Not that I'm not willing to sacrifice. It's a go-to that doesn't make sense in some ways, so how could I be triggered to remember that. I've got to have five. That was four, right Chad? Are you counting?

**Bill:** That was three.

**Brian:** It was two actually.

**Bill:** It was two.

**Brian:** One that I think's a topic that we go to too often, in some ways, but maybe not, is always a health issue. You try to get something healthy. Whether it's eating or exercise and then you're not doing it in three months. Well I think we should just get ourselves set up for being coached every three months on a health issue. I think we should bring that up, and it's not a flaw. It's not a, "Gosh. I wish I could get to a place and never have to approach it again." I know my life. I am not disciplined like that. I'm not a clock. I'm going to have to recalibrate and maybe do something different every three months which that's a whole new mindset too. That's fine. That's fine. What's wrong with that? It's a great investment in myself. I really want to think about how I schedule things because a lot of what I do is creative, so I need blocks of time for that. Right now it's summer, and your summer, Bill, sounds incredibly busy. Mine is slower which is fine, but fall won't be like that, so I'd really like to get that in place before fall. Be thinking through how do I not schedule myself in a way that is killer. I mean what can I do, even now, to prepare that, and what about a fifth one? We've been talking about buying a different house, and we've been talking about that for, let me think, 20 years, I think at this point, and it's time for me to at least start doing some exploring of what that would look like, and not only what I'm looking for, but how, I guess, I get a mindset of looking into that. That's a big topic. Maybe even preparing myself mentally. I know there's a while there that the change just felt... I'm kind of a change agent, but for a while there, that's the last thing I wanted to change, but just talking that through would be great. That's five. Are you satisfied?

**Chad:** That's great. That's wonderful. Yeah.

**Brian:** And what I hear about that, some of the topics I heard are, from you guys and from me, are kind of standard. Yeah, that's cool. You should talk about that. You need that sorted out, and some of them are wow, that's a big issue, and it's important, and it's good to be talking about that because that's a life changer. So I think all of us have maybe a world-changer topic in us. Maybe not everybody, and you don't have to talk about the world change topic every time. Sometimes you just want to get some stuff laid out and set off. So I think that the easy answer to how do you get a client to have five topics off the top of their head like that when you start? Where would you start? Chad, where would you start?

**Chad:** For me, it starts in the intake. There's a reason a person's hiring you as a coach. What's that reason? In the intake, you're really helping a client look at themselves, think about who they are, how'd they get where they are, where're they headed? And it should just naturally say there's something going

on in their life that's the reason they hired a coach, and often times, that can set the agenda, give us the tracks to run on for many sessions. In my coaching, I do ten session contracts, and from that intake, or from the reason the person is hiring me, there are always topics for those ten sessions. Once in a while, though, with the clients who renew and maybe were on much more of, what I think of as, a maintenance routine, where we're going to talk once a month, and there's no, necessarily common issue that's happening for all of our coaching conversations. It's just more of whatever has come up. I do have clients who say, "Gosh. I'm not sure what to talk about." One thing that's helped me is to not misinterpret that as, "I don't have anything to talk about today." I'm not sure what to talk about today is

I'm not sure what to talk about today. There are lots of things. I'm not sure what. That's not the same thing as I don't have anything to talk about. One thing that's helped me both when I'm a client and when I'm the coach is I tend to think in categories, and I tend to think in roles. Categories are things like goals, habits, projects, itches. That's kind of my metaphor. What's something that's kind of been itching you? And we could explore that. Tolerations, those are all categories. The other would be roles. What roles do you play? You're a father, you're a pastor, you're a husband, you're a writer, you're a coach, and look at one of those roles and just what comes up that's coachable about that role. That just helps us start at a higher level that gets us to something more granular the person can be coached around.

**Brian:** I like the way you laid that out kind of hard and fast. Here are a lot of things about roles, and here's a lot of things about, what was the word you used? Not issues, but...

**Chad:** Categories.

**Brian:** Categories. Instead of, I think, an amateur mistake we can make as a coach is to say, "Well, tell me about some tolerations because you don't have a topic." We pick one. We pick tolerations. I like the way you laid it out kind of hard and fast, and see if something sticks. Throwing a lot at the wall rather than just picking one.

**Chad:** Yeah, and you can go a lot of different angles. I've never said this, but I've had my own coach say, "So what's been keeping you up at night?" And it's like, "Oh. You know, coffee, but that's not probably what you mean." It's what's on your mind, and that's not a bad way to identify a topic too.

**Brian:** I like that because it's not categorized. It's a place to look. One I use, if I'm talking to a guy, you could do it the other way as well, but what would your wife tell you that you needed to talk about with your coach, and sometimes they ask them.

**Bill:** I like to caution, particularly new coaches, not to have that favorite question to ask. I think I've heard Chad mention, or somebody mention, in a classroom setting, the idea of what's keeping me up at night, and then for the next six months, every mentor coaching session I did, that's what you'd hear. "Oh, what's keeping you up at night?" So let's use this to spur us on to some ideas that might unlock, but let's make sure that even those questions come out of our relationship with the client, and what speaks to them, and not just our go-tos. I think one of the areas that I like to explore when people are stuck at the beginning is just to think through, to clear up, maybe is a better way to put it, to clear up the notion that coaching is about fixing something that's wrong, and it's a lot of times what blocks people from having a topic to be coached around because their mindset is oh, I've got to come up with a problem to fix, and sometimes, coaching is great for helping think through challenges, and sometimes the coaching is about how do I seize an opportunity, or how do I celebrate something that's going on. So

to kind shift the mindset away from it being to fix problems, and think of it as a way to really take advantage of an opportunity that might be coming. Sometimes that can sour people's thinking.

**Chad:** Let me piggy-back on that, Bill. I haven't done this frequently, but I've done this a few times, is if a client doesn't have a topic to not think, "Oh, that's a problem. Oh, we've got to fix that problem." One of the things I like to do, and again, I've only done this a handful of times, is say, "Oh great, you don't have a topic." When a client comes in, they don't have a topic, that's a perfect time to reimagine life. It's almost like another intake session. Just a where are you in life? What's going on? A pictured step back. Instead of thinking, "Oh no. It's a problem. They don't have a topic. We've got to figure out what the topic is," or let them off the hook, and say, "Oh well. Let's hang up, and we'll talk again two weeks from now." I just sort of go into that, "Oh this is perfectly normal for someone not to have a topic, and that makes a great time for this sort of check in, let's look at your life from kind of the balcony view," and in a way, that's kind of me determining the agenda for that session, but I give myself the permission to do that because that's what I do for intake sessions. I say what we do at the beginning of a coaching relationship is an intake session. What we do every once in a while when there's not a hot, burning topic is we take advantage of that and look at the client's life from the big picture.

**Brian:** And maybe I'm trying too hard and over thinking this a bit because I know I have two clients who I think are excellent leaders who come in and almost always say... I'll say, "What do you want to talk about today?," and they'll say, "Well, I was thinking about that, and I don't have it down exactly, and one reason I don't have it down exactly is because I've found when I come in and talk to you, it usually works out really well that way." What does that mean? What are they saying about that? I think that maybe the desire to have an exact topic and know exactly where they want to go with it is maybe asking too much, or that's something we have a real skill at providing, to help bring some clarity to how to talk about it. People don't just spend a lot of time thinking about these things in the way that maybe we do.

**Chad:** I think part of that, too, Brian is we have a habit of doing as just human beings is we think, "Let's just take one of those topics that Bill mentioned. Bill says, 'Going to New York in a couple of weeks. I'd like to get prepared for that.' That's a topic." Our mind naturally takes the next step to, "What do I need to do?" And we start problem solving. To think that our clients are going to come in with the topic they haven't actually started processing too much... I think what your client is saying is that it works really well for him to think about it enough that he gets almost to a topic, but he can't quite name it because if he could name it, he's probably going to start problem solving, and he'd rather do that with you.

**Brian:** Yeah. That's good, and that's why it's so good to help them. If Bill's topic is I'm going to New York City, it's easy as a coach to say, "Oh gosh, what do you need to do to get ready to go to New York City, or what are you going to need?" But the real question's so hard to say. What he really wants to take away. He might want to think through who could he meet in New York City? I'm just always shocked and surprised by saying, "What do you want to take away from this?" after I ask what the topic is, and really moving that question down after a little bit of discovery, if possible, so that the client often says, "You know what I want to take away," and they didn't even know that's what I wanted to take away. Just really clear on it after having a basic topic and asking a few questions. My big take away from listening is I think that in my coaching, I have been a little nervous about taking a relaxed time in the intake because I want to get right to the delivery. I want them to walk away with some great action steps the first time, and I miss the opportunity to really set the whole series of sessions up well, to know where they overall

want to go. You certainly don't want to miss who their heroes are, those kind of things. How would you close that up, Chad?

**Chad:** That may be a great next podcast edition. What makes for a strong intake session, but I do think if you have a good intake session, it's not a typical session where they just walk away with action, they've got a topic, they walk away with an action based on that topic. It really is setting up the framework for the entire relationship, and although, gosh, every intake session I've ever conducted, they walk away with an insight and an action that they didn't come with a topic. It's probably one of the most valuable sessions they have.

**Brian:** Anything you guys want to add to this topic before we close it down?

**Bill:** I'm glad for whoever raised this question. We hope the others listening will have questions of your own, but this is one of those that certainly could have been anybody because it's a widespread issue.

**Brian:** We want to thank you so much for joining us today. You can find out more about us by going to [coachapproachministries.org](http://coachapproachministries.org), and you can download our free eBook, *The Beginners Guide to Christian Coaching: How to Have Powerful Conversations that Really Make a Difference*. See you next week.